

THE LIFE OF MONSIGNOR  
ROBERT HUGH BENSON



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ROBERT HUGH BENSON







*The Knickerbocker*

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

B. 1907. AGED 35

# THE LIFE OF MONSIGNOR ROBERT HUGH BENSON

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE GODDESS OF GHOSTS," ETC.



IN TWO VOLUMES

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*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS*

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## PART II (*continued*)

JUNE 1905—JULY 1908



# ROBERT HUGH BENSON

## CHAPTER III AT CAMBRIDGE RECTORY

JUNE 1905—JULY 1908

Not on the vulgar mass  
Called "work" must sentence pass,  
Things done, that took the eye and had the price . . .  
But all, the world's coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb,  
So passed, in making up the main account ;  
All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount.  
R. BROWNING.

### I

IN June Father Benson migrated therefore to the Catholic Rectory, where he found himself under the kindly and most congenial presidency of Monsignor Scott.

"It is going," he characteristically writes to Mrs. Benson on June 3rd, 1905, "to be immensely happy here. I am assured that I must do exactly what I like in everything."

In treating of these three years, I shall still endeavour to allow, upon the whole, general views and judgments to emerge for each reader out of accumulated quotations from contemporary letters, feeling sure that, despite a certain scrappiness, or possible repetitions, or even an air of pedantry, readers will prefer to get as near as possible to Father Benson's own mind and mood. Yet, if I may repeat myself, this biography cannot possibly aim at being

an annalistic record of Father Benson's doings, but must offer, if anything, an impression of his interior life. I much hope, then, that it will not be forgotten how momentary, often, is the mood expressed in a letter ; how recast, by the mere act of writing ; how doubly altered, by the intrusion into the writer's consciousness of the particular person to whom he writes. Fortunately, Father Benson was singularly direct and objective, I fancy, in his way of observing and putting down his temper of the moment ; and, in his brief-kept diaries or letters to the most varied people, expresses himself with such verbal identity (as I have noted above), that I certainly think these documents can be trusted as truthful, as far as they go. I need not say that interiorly he was travelling very much farther. Thus he may, and often does, write down *only* the jocular aspect of what struck him as at once a joke, and, perhaps, as angering, and also as sacred and as solemn.

Finally, many individual episodes offer the occasion of digressions not wholly, I trust, illicit. A novel, a letter, may lift, for just the one time in his life, the curtain concealing some whole aspect of his soul. It is sometimes easier to speak of that at once, than to relegate it to some distant chapter. I shall try, therefore, to draw, first, a picture of his life within the walls of Cambridge Rectory ; then, of his activity in strictly parochial matters ; then, of his widening energy and sphere of influence ; then I shall try to discuss the literary work of this period, mainly in connection with his developing personality ; and finally his departure from Cambridge.

The Cambridge church is a splendid building, and the great clock projecting from its steeple infallibly arrests the eye of all travellers who are driving to the railway station.

The house itself is large and of red brick, set back somewhat from the street, and a cedar spreads broad fans of shade across its windows. Over the gargoyle parapet of the church, which at first Hugh Benson found "a little too gorgeous and complete," his tiny bedroom peered. I think he liked this. He could catch the august Presence Chamber, so to say, from the *angle* at which, in his novels, he loved to place the spectators of his greatest scenes; when actually on his knees before the Throne, he found he disliked the baldachino, and was quite sure that his prayers caught in its corners and could not mount beyond its roof. Once, in the midst of a brilliant and logical sermon, he broke off suddenly. "Refresh yourselves," he half whispered, and looked aside to the pulpit Crucifix. So, from the chaff and argument and traffic of his quaint sitting-room, he would look off, for a moment, through the inner window, to the silent house of God.

"It is HEAVENLY," he wrote to Fr. G. W. Hart. "I have nice rooms . . . in the red clergy house next the church. Three windows look into a big garden all overgrown with trees and flowers, and one on to the east end of the church, with angels and griffins grinning at me (the angels do not grin), and the heavenly chimes every quarter-hour day and night. (They play the Alleluia out of the 'Exultet' of Easter Eve, and continual plain-song hymns.) I bathe every afternoon, and write books every morning and evening. Mass 7.20 in convent or church; dinner 1 P.M. Bathe. Tea 4.30 P.M. (generally with an undergraduate or a don) write again till 9—supper—bed."

At once, in the Catholic Rectory, he set to work upon his room. He was delighted from the outset with its position.

"Such a lovely room!" he writes on July 17 to India, "looking into a tangled garden on one side; a sweep of gravel and iron gates on the other; and a bedroom, separated by curtains, looking out on to the church covered all over with stone devils and angels. And my room! I have

hung it with green 'arras-cloth' with panels—polished boards with skins down and one large rug—an oak chest, bureau, table, carved chairs. . . . &c.—all old furniture I have had for years."

Its decoration was, however, a very gradual affair. First, it was the floor which had to be treated. "I am worn out," he writes, "with bees-waxing floors"; and Mr. R. Reynolds, who knew him well at this time, sends me from Greece an entertaining account of his methods.

I remember how tremendously excited he was when he stained the floor of his room at Cambridge with Condyl's Fluid to make the boards look like oak. He explained the process to me in the most thrilling tones.

His story was something like this :

"You go into the room, which, of course, must be empty, with a big p-pot of Condyl's Fluid and sp-p-ill it about all over the f-floor. First it looks a dirty yellow-b-brown colour. Then you run outside the room and sh-sh-shut the door ; and standing on the mat outside you make acts of f-f-faith. Then you open the door and p-pop your head round—and you see the floor has turned a violent p-p-purple. Shut the door again ; more acts of f-faith. On looking in again you find the floor has become a b-b-brilliant red. You feel p-p-perfectly panic-stricken—but you shut the door for a third time and make more and more tremendous acts of f-faith. After that—on opening the door you see a p-p-p-perfect oak floor [a wild chuckle of delight] a *real* miracle. It really is quite stu-p-p-pendous."

As time goes on, he can exclaim to Mr. F. Rolfe :

Some day you must see this room of mine ; green hangings throughout, brown floor, and the rest white. It gives me the greatest satisfaction. . . . "No," he went on on June 24, "(it) is *not* a salad. Say a grove of bay-trees standing among dead leaves. A mahogany writing-desk is the fault ; but I have covered up his end with an immense oak-chest. A scarlet-hued leopard-skin is a little too bright, I am afraid ; but I have sentiments with it, and cannot banish it to the bedroom."

The objection to his colour-scheme had been "the live



green which is everywhere, and makes green paint look so fatuous."

"But it isn't green paint," he retorts; "it is green hangings, and hardly any paint at all. Please believe on faith that it is all right. It is very nearly nature lifted up to grace.

"Hangings," he proceeds, "are for the sake of economy and monotony. You take them with you when you go: and your room is henceforward the same until you die. That is what I wish. You understand I shall probably die some day within these identical hangings."

And when, on July 2, he could say that "Tawny lilies, roses, poppies, sweet-peas and white lilies" were "blazing" against his hangings—"Oh, my goodness!" was the only form of expression left to him, until, in a quieter moment, he decided, "For the first time in my life I am content with my rooms."

These rooms, however, provoked no little criticism. This he quite seriously resented. On December 2 one critic wrote to him:

I don't like the sound of your room at all. (But why shouldn't you have pretty things? You're neither religious nor apostolic. . . .) The arrangement seems ANGLICAN-CLERGY-HOUSEY.

"I think," answered Hugh, "you have reached the supremest spire of insult. If it was in the least deserved, I shouldn't say that. I am much too busy to scratch back. But I have not an idea what you mean by your letter. . . . I am not scratching back: I am merely recording and protesting. In fact, I will leave the rest of your letter until I can deal with it in a spirit that perhaps you may possibly 'like.' But if much more in this strain arrives I shall scratch as HARD AS I POSSIBLY CAN."

This letter, much to his astonishment, provoked violent recrimination. Hugh felt he must go as far as truth permitted him in the direction of apology. He had not, he urged, been taken rightly.

"Picture to yourself," he cried, "an indignant, amused,

feverish, smiling writer, very tired and rather pleased with his handiwork, and slightly ruffled, expecting a sharp, cheerful, indignant riposte. . . . I was cross, but not vexed; indignant, but not angry; cheerful, but not boisterous: fencing with the buttons on, I thought, meaning to hit, and not to wound. . . . I beg of you to believe me. I am neither a liar in this letter, nor a bully in that. I hate cruelty like the devil: its existence is the only thing that reconciles my private judgment to hell.

"There! Finished! And write and tell me so."

At this distance, and with so much history between ourselves and Father Benson's stay in Cambridge, such storms in sitting-rooms seem quite difficult to believe in. Still, I can remember very clearly, at Cambridge, the ruffling of the waters in quite a number of pious houses when Hugh Benson's rooms were mentioned. Many a hostess, who knew them, need I say, only by repute, surmised they must be most unsacerdotal. How should zeal, self-sacrifice, unworldliness go with enormous oaken candlesticks, ancient Madonnas smothered in rosaries, pictures of art-nouveau, and innumerable photographs of friends? How should practical and parochial virtues be found in one whose table (it is true) was piled with what to all, save its creator, was chaos? These voices grew fewer, but more loud, when Hugh migrated to Hare Street. Later, when we ask whether he had an artist's temperament, and, if so, what are its prerogatives, we may conceivably offer some answer to these philosophic doubts. Meanwhile, Hugh was brusquely asking people to mind their own business. . . .

From this withdrawing-room he issued forth to do the work of assistant parish priest.

I must at once confess that although he never exactly shirked the work of a parish, he was given quite a minimum of this to do, and he always frankly hated it.

*August 8.*

I have started visiting, hard, and go round on a bicycle in the afternoons. Rather dreary work. I *cannot* do it; but I suppose it is necessary to make everyone's acquaintance, at any rate.

I have luncheons and dinners and teas till I am nearly mad. I HATE them. I must go to the dentist next week! And I actually have made an appointment. It is horrible to contemplate.

We have a horrible day to-morrow—a water-party with the choir. I am shirking most of it—by unselfishly offering to take the 9.15 Mass, so that I can't possibly start with them. . . .

And yet, observe that this priest, who could not bear, in prospect at any rate, these visits and these outings, was the very soul of them once he had reached his destination, and by his untiring spirits and unselfishness never once suggested to anyone that he was being bored or wished himself away. Doubtless, at the hour, he enjoyed much that in prospect had seemed horrible, yet there is a special pleasure born wholly from giving pleasure, and I think he derived a great deal of his own delight from the delight of those whom he himself had made delighted.

Still there is much in parish work besides these social functions, common to all, and pleasant to some, but by him so deeply dreaded. To sing High Mass falls to the lot of most of the parish clergy, and he sang his first on Corpus Christi, 1905:

I have just come from singing High Mass for the first time. I suppose that some day one will be able to be devout during that action.

Custom, no doubt, soon relieves a priest from fear lest he should flounder in his ceremonies; but what Benson never recovered from, was the torture a long fast meant

to him. It was some time after the last letter from which I quoted that he still could write :

I really am going mad with nerves. . . . It is this horrible fasting and preaching. I take till Thursday to recover—and all the time I am having futile interviews in which I want to tell the people that it doesn't matter a twopenny piece.

The preaching to which he so ruefully alludes began on 4th July ; he having passed his examination for "faculties" and received leave to preach and hear confessions at the end of the previous month.

Although this meant, of course, a very great increase of external work, yet he always found work more exhilarating than idleness, and the introverted energies of a hermit's life were not really intended to be his. The passing of his examination, of which he gives an optimistic and entertaining account, sent his spirits up with a bound. One of the staff, he found, wanted "to do all the work himself": another was "ready to do anything you ask him, (and) entreats me to do nothing but write and preach."

His experiences therefore began at once :

It was very odd being in the Box yesterday, with a candle and an office-book and a rosary, with people coming out of the dim world—all strangers—one could only tell sex and age by voice—and retiring again. This is a very good religion.

"I want you," he wrote to Miss Kyle early in July, "to pray particularly for me next Sunday. I am preaching my first Catholic sermon on 'Hoc [*sic*] est enim voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra.' I have preached it often before in the Church of England ; but it falls in extraordinarily well with the Feast of Relics. It is in the evening at about 7.20 that I actually begin ; and I am as nervous as possible."

"At last," he wrote to another, "I have started in the Box ; and next Sunday start in the pulpit. Please arrange as before with the Nine Choirs.<sup>1</sup> I am very much

<sup>1</sup> His correspondent had undertaken to invoke the Nine Choirs of Angels in his behalf.

frightened; and am conscious of slight physical nausea whenever I let my imagination rest on it. In the Church of England I used to be literally sick, once out of three times, before preaching. It is a horrible thing to preach; and I am always conscious of putting one more stone at each sermon in the house of my damnation."

And at much the same period he wrote to the same correspondent:

Preaching . . . I hate it and love it, like a deep pool. It is terrifying and ecstatic. I need long preparation, much silence, light diet, notes that I can visualise, so that their phantom moves before me. I daren't look at people's faces; I daren't gesticulate unless I find it irresistible—then I do it a lot: at other times not at all. I preach much too fast, and I have violent reactions.

It is pathetic to discover that his preaching, which was even now so great a help and stimulus to many, was to him at this time almost wholly a discomfort:

I am tired—but tired! I pronounced a thirty-eight-minutes-without-a-break discourse last night on

IN IPSO . . . VIVIMUS ET MOVEMUR ET SUMUS,  
and was vulgar, noisy, causing laughter. I hate myself for it; but it is a great temptation.

At times his desolation grew quite black, and reached a point at which, for nights, he found he had to pray that he might die in his sleep.

I am exceedingly depressed. I preached miserably a miserable sermon here last night; I have failed utterly in a job with a boy here—he is a slack creature whom I have been foolishly attempting to brace; and I feel like limp blotting-paper; and he is in the same condition still; and everybody is rather disappointed with me all round. I hate the prospect of the departure, of the journey, of work, of time, of people, of eternity. I am no nearer the end of eternity than I was a hundred years ago. I have, at the present time of writing, neither Faith, Hope, nor Charity. I am in such a mood of blackness that only comes occasionally, D. G. My one consolation is that

I recognise it to be a mood. Therefore I am utterly incapable of dealing with any situation. I have energy neither to merit nor demerit . . . My one consolation is in {Quietism. Fatalism. When one arrives at the bed-rock, one can go no farther. My soul is in a secret and dark chamber beneath the foundations of things; and all my energy is devoted to making it lie still there in a kind of catalepsy. Every movement is pain. Now how can I apologise for all this?

To his mother he wrote more gently :

*April 9.*

Yesterday [Palm Sunday] was perfectly lovely—all except my sermon. We went outside with palms, for the first time in the history of this church, and had a large congregation to see the donkey,<sup>1</sup> we suppose, in the evening. And there was none, except myself, who brayed for half an hour.

Mrs. Benson had welcomed with complete generosity the news that her son had been granted, by his superiors, the right to work as fully and in as many directions as he desired.

TREMANS, HORSTED KEYNES, SUSSEX,  
*July 5.*

I think I am really glad, dearest, that you have full priestly power and responsibility now. Dear me, when I think of two years ago! When don't I, is more true—but how all that waiting time—the conflict, the sincerity—how we all drew together—in bonds that are eternal. It wasn't that we weren't together before—but the very pain of this on both sides knit us so closely. God keep you, my son.

She followed with especial sympathy his sermons, and assisted at many, especially at the Carmelite Church later on; nor did she hesitate lovingly to give him what advice she might for the increasing of their cogency:

<sup>1</sup> He is referring to the extraordinary notion, so prevalent in certain circles, that to carry round the church a figure seated upon a donkey is part of Catholic Palm Sunday ritual.

Yes, dearest, I WAS at the church, and a most benign vergier said "Father Benson's mother?" and showed Lady Radnor and me into a lovely near seat, where we saw and heard and nearly touched you. I liked it enormously, and many of the things you said have been rolling round and round my mind—don't you know when a speaker amuses and convinces at the same moment? LOR, you don't forget it!

This paragraph is not to be read except you are in a very melting mood. There was one thing I DID long for all the time—which was that your voice would convince the heart as much as your words did the mind; the pitch was too high, and I felt the strain. But when you dropped it—all was lovely.

Later on it will be attempted to summarise briefly the line of thought his sermons followed; here it is rather the exterior manner and impression that I am trying to convey. Mr. E. Stephen Harding, then an undergraduate at Cambridge, who knew him well, writes to me from Etaples about those sermons which afterwards formed the small volume entitled *The Religion of the Plain Man*. They related the gradual advance of one of those "ordinary men," whom Benson so much preferred to their more brilliant confrères, from a kind of average Protestantism, mostly negative, into the Church.

. . . Benson started his "Plain Man John" sermons my first term, and they had an immense effect. I used to go on Sunday evenings with a friend who was under instruction to become a Catholic, and I remember after the sermon where R.H.B. had brought John actually into the church, I told my friend how I envied him—the joy of entering the Church was so wonderful as Fr. Benson painted it.

You will, of course, have heard him often, and I suppose he was always much the same. He used to start very calmly and slowly, with that wonderfully clear voice, and not preach, but simply talk to us, with none of the regular pauses, gestures, or inflexions of oratory. He would either hold his stole in both hands and stand

straight up, or else he would lean a little on the front of the pulpit. He would then put the Catholic position into such a hole that I used to sit and wonder, and think, "Well, if he ever gets out of that, I *shall* admire the man." Then he would begin—equally calmly—to unravel the difficulties—each one was explained, laid perfectly bare, and put in its place without the slightest difficulty or confusion. But before very long he would come upon some point which touched him especially, and then he would change; he would become very loud and emphatic indeed, but still with perfect directness and simplicity. I don't think he knew what elocution or oratory was; I don't think he ever in his life considered how he would say a thing—he just said it as he felt it. That was the secret of his power as a preacher—he was extraordinarily convincing.

In that first course of sermons he generally held his congregation like this right up to the end, when he would carry them with him in an impassioned appeal which was nothing else than a prayer. Then he would relapse into the calm in which he started and walk back from the pulpit, mopping his forehead and looking as if he had just come in from a three-mile race. During the rest of the time that he was at Cambridge he continued to preach very similar sermons. Whatever the title of the course, its matter always proved to be much the same. But his very keenness came to work against him. He had himself been in the position that he might be describing, and had found the way out, and knew that it was right, and he could not at the moment understand that everyone else did not see it as clearly as he did. He would roar the words out, crouching down and clutching the head of an old inquisitor that ornaments the pulpit until one expected to see it come off in his hand—and perhaps he flung at the congregation along with the words. "Don't let's have any more of this nonsense!" he would cry; but he was forgetting that for the large number of non-Catholics in the church it might not yet be "nonsense." So also when unravelling the self-propounded difficulties, he would sometimes in his eagerness cut a corner, and skip part of the argument—which was familiar to him, but not to his hearers. In my later years at Cambridge I used to go to hear him with another Protestant friend, who came pretty near the Church, but never actually thought of joining it; and on our way home we were usually discussing some of these



points, where my friend had noticed a failure or a gap in the argument. I always felt that although, in obedience to his calling, Fr. Benson wrote and preached for the sake of the effect that he had on others, by nature he was a pure artist who created simply because he felt the need to create. This—to me—is often apparent in his novels. An idea, curious in itself and worth presenting struck him, and down it went. In fact he never realised what effect it did have on those who met it afterwards, hence the fact that many people admire one part of his writings immensely and dislike the other. I had great difficulty in convincing one lady that two of the Bensons whom she read were the same man.

I liked him much the best when he was not controversial, and the best sermon I heard from him was one in honour of Our Lady, once when term was over. He was extremely humble, and thought nothing of his own opinion when he considered it himself. I once remember him discussing his sermon of the previous day, and saying of one point, "I think that was all right? I don't think that was Modernistic, was it?"—that, to an undergraduate! His personality had a wonderful attraction, which we all felt, and that alone must have enabled him to gain many converts. His voice was exceptionally refined, and his smile all-embracing. He had the cheerfulness of a child, and when he came to lunch in our rooms he enjoyed himself like one. He usually had some new indoor game with a tennis-ball.

His preaching will at all times have struck different people differently, but many criticisms would be eluded if his standpoint could but be held in mind. What Mr. Harding calls "gaps in the argument" were often noticed, and I have been told that scientifically-minded dons, who of their tolerance would go to hear Hugh preach, often returned wringing their hands, and ejaculating: "Most dramatic; most eloquent; most spiritual! but oh, the logical lacunæ; the unwarranted assumptions; the fundamental fallacies!" It is the laudable scientific habit, of course, to rest as little as possible upon hypothesis, and

above all to omit no step in a process of proof. Yet even scientific men, with the help of a preface or two, telling their readers where they start, may at times be allowed to begin in the middle. Hugh Benson was not required in every sermon, or even course of sermons, to outline his entire scheme of Christian apologetics, still less, to offer in detail proofs of, say, the date and authenticity of the Scriptures, the possibility of a Revelation, the credibility of an Incarnation, or the validity of ideas. Of course there were gaps, and gaps which perhaps not Father Benson could satisfactorily have bridged. But he personally had crossed the chasm, and was content to explain the country where he found himself to those even who would not admit he was standing on solid earth at all. If, he held, they felt themselves moved to take the risk, and to leap, so much the better ; he had experienced the validity of his foothold ; for such as would try, at his advice, to reach it too, he could have nothing but encouragement. Others he was ready to hand over to such persuasion as their especial need might tolerate.

None the less, his reputation as the best preacher in Cambridge became so general, and his spell upon young men so remarkable, that Mr. A. C. Benson was asked to use his influence with Hugh that he should leave Cambridge.

. . . This I totally declined to do, and suggested that the right way to meet it was to get an Anglican preacher to Cambridge of persuasive eloquence and force. I did eventually speak to Hugh about it, and he was indignant. He said, "I have not attempted, and I shall not attempt, any sort of proselytisation of undergraduates ; I don't think it fair, or even prudent. I have never started the subject of religion on any occasion with any undergraduate. But I must preach what I believe, and, of course, if undergraduates consult me, I shall tell them what I think, and why I think it." This rule he strictly adhered to ; and I do not know of any converts that he made.

Besides the social functions incident to pastoral life, the confessional, and the preaching, now the interviews are beginning, and beyond all else will re-inspire Hugh with the love of solitude :

Yesterday I spent the morning with a clergyman, his wife, and three Bibles—Douay, A.V., and R.V.—discussing twenty-nine Petrine texts. And I am DEAD AND BURIED to-day.

Sometimes these visits issued into joy, and on the day when he received his first convert, he wrote delightedly to his mother :

She is receiving congratulations from everyone except from High Church people, who are angry. She is amazed to find how Low Church we all are ! And exceedingly pleased to find it so.<sup>1</sup>

From the great piles of letters addressed by or to those who came to him in the course of their struggles towards the Church, I hope to quote more when I speak of his work as a "director." I may be allowed, however, to put down here a few sentences from his letters to this lady. It will be seen, by comparison, how identical they are in spirit, and almost verbally, with what he had now for more than one year written, and will write, till quite the end.

Self-distrust, he was urging on July 8, in so far as it *ought* to be cured, can be, by "a kind of recklessness of faith in God." "Throw yourself from the edge, and you will find yourself safe and sure." . . . "I am almost envious of the happiness that you will have." "There is nothing in the world like home-coming."

Do not, he urges her, half *fear* this happiness : suffering is "a vocation like any other ; and God, at any given moment, may not call a soul to follow by that road. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> And another time he wrote with glee : "It is such a relief not to be more High Church than one's Bishop !"

"How I wish people would UNDERSTAND!—and perceive that one has come out from a cave into the sunlight, and has really no energy for anything but happiness, and that one is NOT bitter or abusive or selfish, and desires nothing but the love of God and man."

A pathetic feature in many of these conversions from the High Church party is the failure of an esteemed Director to achieve a similar reward.

*August 2 [1905].*

It is very puzzling indeed why people as good and sincere as he is do not come into the Church. How extraordinarily happy he would be! The comfort is, however, that he stays where he is because it is a difficult post. When he understands that for a chivalrous soul like his own, the exchange of difficulty for ease (of soul) is the supreme sacrifice, we may begin to expect him.

Catholics themselves, he reminds her, may be culpably lacking in warmth of welcome. It has been possible for those "of the household" to regard themselves even as some close corporation, intrusion into which they resent. Catholics "seem to forget that the Church is an inclusive body, not an *exclusive*." Hence a sectarian spirit. Foreign Catholics are a delight. To see a French priest say Mass at Bishop Stortford! "He had to learn no new language."—"May I ask you," he concludes, "to use three words for me? OMNIA, O SANCTITAS! One so continually finds out that one has nothing at all—(indeed this is not 'prideful humility')—that one may as well face that fact, and ask for everything."

More and more, if change there be in his constant letters, he will trust to the irresistible drawing of the Spirit. He still will emphasize that not the *fact* of graces received in the Anglican past is to be denied, but the illegitimacy of the *mode* of seeking them is to be recognised when once God's appointed scheme of Church and sacra-

ments has been acknowledged; he will insist that the Irish applewoman *must*, in this matter, be as competent as Dr. Pusey; and in all this you will see that the underlying preoccupation is ever, not to obtain an accurate argument, but to ensure free passage and action for grace and the Spirit.

It must be confessed that, at first at any rate, this social intercourse was often as great a delight to him as it undoubtedly was to those who called upon him. Prior McNabb, O.P., writes to me of his encounter with Hugh at this period:

I carry with me a picture of an intensely living being, seated but by no means rooted on a sofa, smoking endless cigarettes and pouring out or drinking in stories, thoughts, ideas with the energy of a fledgling taking food from its mother's beak. He seemed to be so eager for thoughts that he fairly took them out of your mouth. Explanations were not needed. He had seized and swallowed, if he had not masticated, your thoughts before you had reached the end of the tale or argument. His attention was a display of eloquence.

"He was always very accessible," writes Mr. Reynolds; "but though one could run up to his rooms whenever one felt inclined, I, at least, never liked to sit down for long conversations when, as always, I saw his table littered with manuscript and correspondence, and his pen wet.

"I succumbed to his extraordinary personal charm from the first moment I saw him. The enormously friendly smile he would always give on being introduced to someone (a very particular smile—peculiar to these occasions) was enough, I think, to conquer the hearts of most people.

"The first time I saw him we discussed our 'ages'—there was only a month's or so difference between us, both being about one year. I remember he asked me 'What *did* you?' and on my replying 'Newman, chiefly,' he said 'Same with me; and I am sure the same answer would be given by ninety-nine out of a hundred educated converts.' We talked of mutual friends. He always said the same of everybody: 'N-n-nice man that.' A lot of

Anglican bishops were mentioned. He said the same of them all—‘Oh, dear me; such a nice, kind man—quite extraordinarily kind.’ . . . ‘Such nice men—so incredibly stupid of them not to be Catholics; what a pity!’ was also said of the Bishops. I never *once* heard him say anything nasty or even sharp of anybody, the worst being—‘It’s *so* stupid of him, and I’m certain he’s nice, really nice.’ I always felt that he spoke so not on some dry principle, but because he really was extraordinarily sympathetic.”

These serene judgments were genuine, and a true expression of an almost normal mood. That does not prevent his diary containing some fairly sharp criticisms on persons and, as his fatigue, rising from overwork, increased, his verdicts became more grave, if not exactly more severe; and at all times he could be deliberately furious.

A gorgeous liar came and called on me last night, giving his name as Hubert Benson—and begging (!)—I have got such a speech prepared for him—he won’t forget it till the end of his life—if then.

Of a more anxious episode he wrote as follows :

I have discovered one more dangerous and treacherous opponent, but I’m going to have immense fun. He is coming here, I understand, posing as my friend; but he has unfortunately said aloud to indiscreet and friendly persons that he is coming to see what I am really up to, and to pick holes, and to report. Now, two days ago I received a most damaging report of him from an Anglican; this I propose to tell him softly before he can get a word out. I shall entreat him to be careful for his own sake. . . . He is extremely nervous, and he will just SWEAT, and protest and question, and will have no time or energy to observe me. Isn’t that perfectly charming? Up to the present moment I have treated him with confidence; and I still like him, though apparently he is capable of betraying with a kiss. I’LL LEARN HIM. I have no kind of ill-will, and gurgle and buzz with childish delight whenever I contemplate the prospect.

Dear me! This world is very odd. I shall want a

number of explanations from the Authorities when I see Them.

And to a clergyman who accused him of dishonourable tampering with the religion of one of his servants he wrote with such ferocity that an apology of the humblest character came by return of post. Instantly peace smiled serene, and the whole episode disappeared from memory.

But even these duels, you may without difficulty see, had for him something of the general excitement of the *game*.

The burden of correspondence was already becoming excessive, and his postcards were growing as famous as Mr. Gladstone's. Already on May 11, 1905, he could write from Llandaff House to an exigent correspondent :

I fear it is quite impossible for me to write very often. I thought I had explained that before ; I do not think you realise what an immense amount I have got to do. . . . I am working against time already.

The writer was remorseless, and in November his tone was more exacerbated :

Surely I have explained before that I am absolutely overwhelmed with work. . . . I am writing no new books. I have done nothing except odds and ends since June. If this kind of thing goes on, I shall have to give up parochial work altogether. I think really that you should understand this, and not ask for impossibilities. Every letter that I write is a real burden. I still manage to write to my mother once a week and to one single friend who is a Catholic, but is on speaking terms with no Catholic except myself. All my other friends have to trust me when I let month after month go by without writing ; and I find that they do so. Cannot you do so too ? . . .

It is really sufficiently maddening as it is to have to spend three or four hours a day in correspondence ; and it is seldom less than that. I have to refuse nearly all

invitations, to scamp my sermons, to neglect visiting, and to write no books at all, when all the while my mind is almost bursting with them. I have also, I should think, about a dozen vital cases of people in acute trouble on my hands.

Added to all this, I unfortunately have a temperament which, unless it gets a certain amount of fresh air and silence and sleep, simply becomes uncontrollably nervous and incompetent.

Very soon afterwards he has to insist that it must be postcards, for the most part, or nothing.

I perfectly understand that your nature is one that needs sympathy; and such a sympathy as I possess is certainly yours. Only, *I have not time to be continually saying so . . .* nor can I afford myself the pleasure of writing accounts of all that is going on.

He apologises for any sharpness on his side, and explains how he views irritation in his correspondent:

I read your letter with great surprise and sorrow; then I saw plainly that you too must have written it in great haste, and that it was not your real self which had written it; so I destroyed it at once, for fear I should be tempted to read it again, and to judge you by it. I regard it now as not having been written; and I will never refer to it again, to you or to anyone else.

Business letters, he insists, occupy all the morning, so he writes only postcards to his friends.

"I have to ask all my friends to remember this, and not to expect answers to their letters. The result is, of course, that acquaintances stop writing; but that my friends understand."

To the same persistent correspondent he at last wrote bluntly:

My correspondence is (1) on definitely spiritual points on which I am consulted by people who follow a Rule of Life suggested by myself, and then, once in three months or so, consult me about any doubtful point.



(2) Short letters, making appointments, or saying Yes or No—chiefly cards.

There is no living being, except my mother, with whom I “correspond” in the ordinary sense of the word.

I am, unfortunately, a “business man” in affairs of the soul, and have to behave like one.

Finally, at Hare Street, when the post appeared, he would leap from his novel or his tapestry with a groan, pile up his correspondence before him, seize a cigarette, arrange his postcards by him, and, as some one said, “take a pen, sit down quickly, and write fifty.”

But do not for a moment think that his predominant attitude was severe. Nothing in the world caused him such interior commotion as stupidity,<sup>1</sup> though other spiritual assaults might (as we shall see) strike deeper. Yet, to one who wrote to him railing at what he considered the fatuity of the mediocre man, who so universally (it was argued) held the reins of life, he replied :

*March 2.*

Even the “fatuists” of whom you speak appear to me to have got hold of a piece of truth. . . . That piece of truth is extraordinarily false when isolated from the rest—I know all that—but yet it is all that they can get hold of ; and although they certainly need kicking, yet I think one must kick with tenderness and discretion, and I hope you will continue to do it “as I should wish to see it done.”

And if I must fasten on what seems to me by far the most profound impression his correspondence created, it certainly is that of his extreme courtesy, forbearance, and vivacity, and the endless labour he would exact from himself on behalf of strangers. “Who could have guessed,” is a recurrent refrain in letters I receive, “that he would have put himself to so much trouble for me, a complete stranger

<sup>1</sup> “If you hadn’t been a priest,” one wrote to him, “what a cynical devil you would have been !”

to him?" The moment a letter revealed some sincere request—for literary criticism, for recommendation to some post or other, and, of course, for spiritual guidance—there was literally nothing he would not do, and for a space of months and years, to assist the inquirer. What he absolutely denied to himself and others was the writing of banalities or of sheer news.

It was during these years, too, that his career as lecturer began. To start with, he lectured almost entirely upon "Christian Mysticism." This was due, I think, a good deal to his book, *Richard Raynal*. "I had no idea," one critic wrote, "that *Modern Catholicism* found a place for mystics." A Cambridge professor applied to him, after reading it, on behalf of a Hindu student of Indian philosophy, to be "informed about the Catholic ascetic method in mysticism and psychology." He put his ideas on mysticism together in the form of a lecture, which shall be analysed below, and gave it for the first time on October 15, 1906, before a literary society called the Catholic Women's Conference, which used to meet at that enterprising centre of Catholic educational interest, the Convent of the Holy Child, in Cavendish Square. He gave it again to the Cambridge University Nonconformist Union on February 10, 1907, in return for which he was offered honorary membership; again on February 26, to a meeting of Christian Theosophists at Bloomsbury; and again on February 28, in the Westminster Cathedral Hall, as one of the third series of Westminster lectures organised by Dr. Aveling. It is in this shape that it is printed. Once more he gave it at Miss H. Anderson's house at Oxford in April; and the Theosophical Society in London having already asked him in February for an address on "The Catholic's Search for God," or, if he preferred it, "The Search for

God," he docketed the invitation, "Told them to ask again," and, as far as I can understand, fulfilled this half-promise on April 4, 1908.

"I have read 'Christian Mysticism,'" he wrote to Mrs. Benson on April 11, "to a Society of Theosophists!!—who now want to print it in their magazine. Lor! And I spared them nothing. They were delightful, and said nothing but nice things; and just behind me on the platform there was a huge picture of Madame Blavatsky."

Another experience was not so pleasant. It occurred, so far as I can gather from the dishevelled dating of his letters, at Miss Anstice Baker's house in London, in the November of 1907:

*November 24.*

I talked for a good while to Miss —, who gave me the impression of a gaslight immediately above my head. . . . The Mysticism paper was an extraordinary affair, two hundred people filling the room and passage and stair. A Monsignor in the chair; most of the people were theosophists and scientists and all the rest; two violent women got up and abused the Church, and I was so offensive back again that they left the room. Then I tore back here at 11.15.

He printed, too, in the *Quest* for October 1910, the lecture on the "Life of Jesus Christ in His Mystical Body," which he delivered to the *Quest* Society on February 10, 1909. And I may mention out of chronological sequence an interesting letter sent to him by Mrs. Annie Besant on July 25, 1911:

REV. FATHER,—The Theosophical Society is publishing a Text-book, of which Part I, on doctrines belonging to all religions, and Part II, on moral teachings belonging to all religions, are already published. Part III consists of a series of papers, written by men of different faiths, setting forth the special points which differentiate their religions, each putting forth his own faith in its noblest aspect. Canon Erskine Hill has written for the Anglican Church; I have a paper on Roman Catholicism, but it is written by

a Modernist, and in no way puts the Church in the warm and attractive fashion which gives it its power over the hearts of men. Would you write a paper of about fifty octavo pages, presenting the Church's teachings in the way to attract non-Catholics and to show their value? It will reach a number of people of all faiths, and I thought you might be willing to do it. You have a perfectly free hand in the exposition; the only thing barred is direct attack on any other form of religion; it is not attack to claim exclusive possession of truth.—Sincerely yours,

ANNIE BESANT.

It would be outside my plan, I may repeat, to catalogue from engagement books the other occasions on which he gave this lecture or lectures on allied subjects, *e.g.* on "Christian Science" at St. Edmund's, Ware, in 1908, "Personality," &c.;<sup>1</sup> I have preferred to take these few specimens from letters, where, beside the mention of the fact, some comment too might be relied upon. He felt, one must confess, only a modified pleasure in his lectures, and was never fully at home on platforms; he looked uncomfortable, many felt, in his frock-coat, which, for some inscrutable reason, he wore buttoned tightly up; he felt himself at a strain, and less legitimately hot than when the pulpit somehow warranted his mopping his forehead at the full-stops. In spite of this, he found himself not unprepared to lecture in October, 1913, on "A Theory of Public Speaking."

Other favourite topics of his were, of course, connected with the history of the Reformation and the psychology of conversion. Thus on January 8, 1907, he spoke at a *Conversazione* of the Manchester Branch of the Church Temperance Society, at the invitation of Dean Rothwell, upon

<sup>1</sup> In 1908, *Fiction* shows itself as a topic for repeated lectures, and after his return from Lourdes in the late summer of that year, he will speak constantly upon Lourdes. The "Paradoxes of Christianity" have by then begun to claim his attention, both in the pulpit and on the platform.

"Roads to Rome," and repeated this lecture next day at Leicester, for the three secular parishes of that town, a visit which give him a quite especial pleasure, inasmuch as it brought him once more in touch with those Dominican religious to whom Father Buckler, his father in the faith, belonged. Rather later, and again next year, he gave the Catholic evidence lecture at St. Wilfrid's, Preston, at the request of Father Wright, S.J., now Provincial of the English province of the Jesuits; and at Liverpool in October and November of 1907 he lectured at St. Thomas of Canterbury's Church, Waterloo, Liverpool, for the Very Rev. Father Walsh, upon "Experiences of a Convert 'Before' and 'After.'" I will say at once that preaching in Liverpool, especially at St. Francis Xavier's Church, seemed to him to be something of a unique experience. Never had he spoken to such great and enthusiastic crowds. The comprehensive activity of that parish, too, impressed him hugely; and his letters to his mother and to his friends, Catholic and Anglican, are always full of this on each occasion of his visits. He was coming, too, to preach in the big London churches, as at the Servite Church in Fulham, on the festivals of the Servite Founders in 1907 and of Our Lady's Sorrows in 1908; at Farm Street, to the Sodality of Our Lady, on October 5, 1907; and next year on the Feast of St. Ignatius Loyola; and from his engagement-books which survive it would no doubt be possible to make up a tolerably accurate list of the churches at which he delivered ordinary Sunday sermons, either singly or in groups, such as Lents and Advents. Some of the more important of these I shall try to mention in a later chapter; but, I repeat, I am in no sense trying to give a complete account of his lectures or his sermons.

What he liked far better than these ordinary sermons

of devotion were the special sermons on occasions connected with English Catholic history. These filled him with a kind of mystical enthusiasm, and he saw all around him the opening blossoms of the Second Spring. Thus on June 5 in 1906 he preached at the York Pilgrimage, and on July 24 of the same year at St. Augustine's, Ramsgate, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the return to Thanet of the Benedictine Order. On April 23 he preached at the pilgrimage to the ancient and very famous shrine of Walsingham, and gradually there were few of the more notable Catholic centres which he had not visited. One excellent result of this was the complete revolution which occurred in his general attitude towards his fellow-clergy. To start with, as I said, he felt out of place among them. This was not due to churlishness on their part, however little some of them might approve of his rapid ordination. This he readily recognised. On July 3, 1905, he wrote to Mr. Rolfe :

I go off to a Synod to-day—God help me! And come back to-morrow—God bless me!

*July 7th.* The Synod was astounding. They jawed like crows. But they were extremely friendly, and the Bishop more than charming.

In his letter to his mother, about the same date, he emphasizes the gaiety and courtesy of his hosts, and the great trouble to which they put themselves to please him. Besides, in his heart he was impressed, as well as touched ; he felt himself something of a cheeky schoolboy (he confessed) among these men who undoubtedly had borne the heat and labour of the day.

With religious communities he had found himself even less in sympathy so far. A highly differentiated personality like his is bound to resent, as it were, the strong impres-

sion made by the collective personality of a community. Benson felt himself watched and judged. "When I am with my brethren of Downside or Stonyhurst," he wrote to a famous critic, "I feel I am speaking a different language." All this died away, or altered in flavour, so to say ; and the happy change was due, on his side, to the quelling eagerness and simplicity, and the readiness to learn how to make friends, which radiated from his own personality ; and also to many kind actions and letters, such as the following, of which it would be hard to measure the good effect upon him.

Father Thomas Crank, of Chorley, had on March 22, 1906, asked him to preach,

to give my congregation—an old English Catholic body—the chance of seeing and hearing one who might perchance help them to realise more fully the gifts and helps of that faith which they appear to accept quite as a matter of course. Then I hoped to make you more favourable, by telling you that if you cared to be my guest for a few days, you might permit me to take you to Preston, on the Monday, to see the Guild Procession, and on Tuesday to the Broughton Catholic Charitable Dinner. The latter is unique of its kind—Lancashire farmers and priests foregathering for the day. . . . Then you might like to see Stonyhurst and our own College of St. Joseph. . . . I feel that it will do us (born Catholics, and descended from a long line of Catholics) good to be brought into intercourse with those who have fought their way into the Church—I know that we should learn much.

I can imagine no possible action, on the part of a complete stranger, more calculated to bring happiness to Hugh Benson than this letter of generous welcome, and the desire it showed of making the neophyte feel at home. It filled Benson with the most keen delight ; his happiness expanded in this friendly atmosphere ; he exulted in these

kind offers, whether he could profit by them or not, and he made his mother to share regularly in his pleasure.

Besides sermons, he preached retreats—a few only, for he was never a great retreat-giver. I think he never gave a laymen's retreat.<sup>1</sup> He loved best St. Mary's Convent at Cambridge, and I should like here to quote some pleasant recollections of the children's retreats he gave there :

Twice Fr. Benson gave the children's retreats. His first was in the year 1907, towards the end of May. He was at the Cambridge Rectory then, and came from there to spend the day with the retreatants. That year there were many outsiders present ; some staying in the house and some attending the meditations daily. He made it understood from the beginning that the retreat was wholly and entirely for the children ; if others attended, they must understand that they were not being taken into account ; they had, so to speak, to take the crumbs that fell from the children's table. And this they willingly agreed to hold sufficient, as indeed it proved to be. The keynote to these retreats, as to all his work, was frank simplicity, thoroughness and enthusiasm. He required of the children that they should be absolutely silent, if possible ; else, he preferred that they should have a stated time for a good game and then return to recollection rather than have a desultory breaking of silence throughout the day. And he was right, as he mostly was. The silence was kept so scrupulously by some, that the Religious going round at night to say the usual " Good-night—God bless you," did not receive the usual answer from out of the darkness. Beside the silence, Fr. Benson wished the children to work with him. They were to take notes of the discourses even during the time of their delivery, he said ; so each child came to the chapel armed with paper and pencil and took down whatever struck her, regardless of spelling or other difficulties. These notes were not thrown away after the retreats ; they were dear to the children, because they were his and they were their own. The second retreat was in 1912, and was confined to the children. Fr. Benson had left Cambridge, and he returned

<sup>1</sup> He very much enjoyed giving, however, the Conferences to the Catholic undergraduates of Oxford in the summer term of 1907.



for the three days, taking rooms in Paston House, the Convent annexe. He gave himself wholly up to the children, but in the repose hour, when not wanted, retired to a little summer-house in the garden and smoked cigarettes, meditating, or reading novels. He begged to be provided with "lots and lots of novels," he seemed to have some particular end in view, and skimmed through quite a lot of such as were put at his disposal. At meals he asked to be left alone, but relented and was glad to have some one with him to talk at his last meal. He ate quickly and with a sort of absent-mindedness, and often illustrated with diagrams made out of the forks and spoons and other implements lying about. In the confessional he was most helpful, and the youngest children used to quote him unblushingly for months afterwards. He refused to give a conference between dinner and tea, 3-4; he said it was an impossible hour for preacher and congregation alike.

In the same year he gave the retreat at St. Mary's Convent, York, for which he always had a special affection, and on the whole it may be said that he was a man who kept closely to a few beloved localities for the accomplishment of what he felt to be, in a sense, his most effortful spiritual ministry. At Princethorpe (July, 1913), Ampleforth, Brighton, Stamford Hill, too, he found a welcome which left vivid and glad memories in his mind.

However, his work was not without its compensations, and even its holidays.

I will assign as downright holiday the hours he spent at St. Mary's Convent, Cambridge, to which I have just alluded. "What a delicious life that is!" he notes in his diary. "They are so reasonable and humorous. Quite unlike Church of England convents, Miss L. says." His love, too, for children has been already noted; but until he knew the convent well it was, for the time, not satisfied.

"I wish," he wrote in that interspace, "there were some children here that I could look after. But it takes a long time to get intimate with a child; and no wonder,

because a child's friendship is the greatest joy and compliment in the world ! ”

However, children soon learnt what a happiness, in Father Benson, was destined to be theirs ; and to Father Hart he wrote, after only a month :

We had a first communion of twenty-five children here last week, and they spent the rest of the day riotously in the Rectory—such charming creatures. We fought duels in my room, and had an exhibition of the Pope's Cap, spears, idols, a leopard-skin, &c.

Later on, he confesses frankly that his visits to the convent are little hours of paradise. He wrote plays for the children and got them up. I will speak of these below. He gave retreats to the nuns, and used the fragrant and happy atmosphere of their “ parlours ” as that best fitted for those would-be converts whom he was instructing, to breathe. Singularly enough, memories of Father Benson there seem, as it were, undetailed and undifferentiated among themselves. Not that the memory of Father Benson, as a whole, can be undifferentiated. Wherever he was, he was “ different.” But coming into that dim but happy world like a ray of light, a vivid breeze, he left it brighter and fresher still, yet unable to tell you exactly in what detail the vivifying force had resided and how it had issued forth. Yet perhaps this is not singular ; where a man is perfectly at home, he may be absolved from any duty of being noticeable, memorable, or striking. In the intimate conversations of a friend, epigrams are not expected, and it is preferred that he be lovable rather than startling.

A few recollections, however, of Father Benson in some of his most characteristic moods reach me from Mother Mary Salome, of the Cambridge convent, herself a well-known writer of books for young girls and children :

It was Christmas time ; the Children of Mary were invited to a party. To meet them came, of course, Father Benson. He was in excellent form, out to please and be pleased. He joined in the games and he played the piano. He played the two-finger duet with an organist, and it was eventually performed in a highly creditable manner amid the applause and to the immense delight of his audience. When a penknife was stuck in a door and a thimble placed on it for the purpose of testing accurate eyesight, Father Benson was among the most eager. He took up his position some yards away from the door, shut his right eye in the proper manner, and then with all the zest of a schoolboy advanced to knock off the thimble. He did not at first succeed, but he persevered until his aim was accurate. It is impossible to imagine him not succeeding even in such a small thing as this. A Belgian child introduced to the convent a game called "Diabolo," which soon became a favourite in England. Father Benson set himself to acquire the necessary skill to throw up the hour-glass-shaped toy and catch it again on a distended piece of string. It was by no means easy, and this fact added to its pleasure for Father Benson. He took the thing on to the lawn and gave himself up whole-heartedly to the achievement. His eyes followed the gyrations of the toy in its right to left motion ; and his tongue, a little protruding, travelled from one corner of his mouth to the other as the thing moved from side to side. In a quarter of an hour he was able to send up into the air and catch four or five times in succession the toy on his string. There are not many who have learned the game quicker.

Father Benson often accepted the children's invitation to tea and story-telling. They would all sit round the schoolroom fire together in the dusk of a winter's evening until the hands of the clock on the mantelshelf above pointed to six, the time for studies. Then there was a hurried "good-bye," and the entertainment was over. But the stories were by no means over, for they had generally been about ghosts and phantoms and mysterious appearances. In fact, such an effect had these narrations on the children's minds that their character had to be changed, and a solemn promise was exacted from the story-teller, before the evening's sitting was begun, that no ghosts should appear. Father Benson did not talk all the time ; he listened with pleasure to the smallest child's experiences, and never

seemed to be bored, even when some of the older girls, less patient, quietly nudged the little one to come to a hasty conclusion.

He also wrote us the Nativity play, and no detail was too small for his attention. He planned the style and colours of the dresses ; he lent pewter mugs, deerskins, and daggers, rich pieces of material for the merchants, head-gear, and girdles. He superintended the scenery, and supplied wonderful effects by simple means. For instance, in the first scene the background was of very dark blue paper, pierced with holes and lighted by a powerful incandescent lamp from behind ; this was splendid. On the lower part of the blue sheet he whitewashed-in the distant hills of Bethlehem, and in the foreground linen sheets, laid down on uneven surfaces, showed up like drifts of snow. In all such plannings he liked his own way, and mostly got it, much to our amusement. It was thought by some that he had overdone the stars by jabbing his penknife too profusely in the blue paper, so quite stealthily a number of the jabs were pasted up, and the stars shone out more evenly and at a greater distance. The effect commended itself to the reforming party, but on the night it was found that new jabs made up for the old. No comment was made on either side. Father Benson watched over the choral practices of the carols, which are such a feature of this play ; while Dr. Naylor of Emmanuel, the convent master of music, was called in to give expert assistance. Father Benson rehearsed the children with the sweetest patience and brotherliness. He acted difficult bits for them, explained the arts of ingress and egress, and made the whole thing a religious act by prayer before each rehearsal and reverence throughout. In the last act of the Nativity play the three wise men come in gorgeously arrayed. Among the stage properties there was the head and neck of a camel, made out of cardboard and astonishingly lifelike. It was suggested that it would add greatly to the picture if the camel could be introduced from a wing, giving it the appearance of being "all there." Father Benson hated the idea ; he could not do with shams of any kind, but he was courteous and disliked giving pain ; nevertheless, he managed to urge so many excellent reasons for the camel's absence that the beast was withdrawn without a murmur.

On the night of the first performance a conservatory was

turned into a green-room as being near the stage and warm. There the children came for their last touch up. Old Zachary got his wrinkles from Father Benson's own hand; he stood over the kneeling girl and most seriously rubbed the grease paint in. He was very particular about accessories—the lighting of the scenes, the placing of the furniture, the exact shade of a garment. Our Lady's robe was to be of the darkest blue; her djibba white, but not too fresh a white, for she had been travelling. A certain cushion in the Kings' scene was wanting at the last moment. He was told it could not be got; it was at the top of the convent, and the play was being acted in an annexe. He would listen to nothing and some one had to trudge off and get it. His absorption once betrayed him. He wanted to cross from one side of the stage to the other, which he did, not observing that the curtain was up, and that he was in full view of the spectators. However, the transit was so rapid and the absorbed look on his face so little out of place, that the intrusion passed almost without notice.

He took the same interest in his historical play, *Joan of Arc*, and was greatly struck with the little Joan, who cried real tears at nearly every rehearsal, and whose mother in the audience nearly broke her heart.

In *Hugh* we hear of Mgr. Benson's disregard of personal appearance, and it can hardly be exaggerated. It seemed to come from a preoccupied mind, one engrossed with things much more interesting than clothes. He often came to the convent in a coat so long, that it pretty well covered the cassock underneath. The skirts of at least one cassock hung in tatters round the hem; the buttons were clothless and the cuffs ragged.

One day when Mgr. Benson was present as a guest at an entertainment, it was found that his shoe-buckle was hanging loose. Some one offered to have it made safe, and he gladly handed it over, standing in his sock on one leg, whilst he chatted unconcernedly to his neighbours.

It is astonishing how soon his stammer was forgotten, considering how really marked it was at particular times and in certain company. Once he walked round the convent garden with a convert of his, who also had a slight hesitation in her speech and who apologised for its awkwardness. He immediately explained the phenomenon by saying confidently that "it was a mere matter of the

w-w-w-ill." Mgr. Benson was fond of animals, but he could never make friends with the convent terrier called "Mike," who resented anything being taken from the place; even the dustmen had a bad time. And Father Benson, bringing a bicycle, naturally wanted to take it back. This gave occasion to scenes, and once Mgr. Benson threw a stone at the dog, fully intending to miss him, but hoping to clear the pugnacious creature out of his way. This offence was never forgiven, and was not palliated by Mgr. Benson's mousing vigorously and constantly in the bushes to arouse Mike's well-known hatred of cats.

He liked to bring his friends to the convent, specially prejudiced people. His idea was that if they saw Religious in their life and home their prejudices would naturally vanish. He was often successful, and has been the cause of winning for the convent many friends. Once he invited three undergraduates to tea with him there. Two came, and the afternoon passed agreeably away. The third, it afterwards transpired, could not bring himself to cross the threshold of the house.

His association, too, with his brother, Mr. A. C. Benson, prospered exceedingly, and the brothers went for long bicycle rides together. A singular little diary, dated from July 12 to October 15, with long gaps, survives—the only example of diaries, so seldom written by Hugh, which I can find.<sup>1</sup> From it a list of these bicycle rides might be

<sup>1</sup> I have called it singular, in view of Hugh's reputed character and of his position. It is almost that of an intelligent schoolboy; very objective, intent on outward facts, carefully noting bathes, sport, visits, presents, fatigue, and the like. There is practically no introspection, no tenderness whatever, and no piety or reference (save for names of converts and subjects of sermons, &c.) to religion. There are a good many character sketches rather acidly expressed. "We went to see a clergyman called X. Z., a curious little man of ill-fame. His church is superb." "Lady X. is ludicrously like —. She has a dozen of her tricks: a slow, stately atmosphere. She will go far. She has a nice mind, a great deal of self-reliance, a reasonable knowledge of things. Her manner is the best of her, I think. It is splendid, anyhow." "He has a vast will, immense determination, a real and subtle piety; he is an artist, yet imaginative. He is rather an executer than a conceiver, a photographer of every plane, deft, vivid, strong; a good lover . . . first self-centred, then acquisitive: he takes without question all that all can give him of every kind; a magnificent friend, a dangerous enemy. I believe he has a real affection for me; certainly I have a

compiled. The brothers visited a number of old churches and houses, of which the diary preserves the architectural details. The rides were diversified by theological discussion, carried forward on an assumption of ultimate cleavage frankly recognised, and a mutual deference as long as might be possible.

*July 13.*—We went ride. Arrived at satisfactory divergence, to where gulf opens, and then stopped, as I liked. Visited Haslingfield, &c.

*July 24.*—Lunch with A. C. B. Then we walked to Magdalene—then to King's Gardens, where we walked and talked. A. C. B. talks as if he were a materialist, but nothing is less true. He says that he does not wish to mistake hopes for beliefs. He pretends to regard scientific certainty as the only one; but he evades the fact that artistic certainty is certainty by explaining it as subjective. Then why are not sense impressions subjective?

*July 26.*—Dined with Arthur—a long talk in the balcony, chiefly about religion. He is extremely interested and interesting. At last we got down to defining terms, and ended in the street. I do not really understand his position. It is logical, as a scheme, but it is not what he lives by.

*July 27.*—Lunched with A. C. B. and Fred, who came in to see me first: E. F. B. and I bathed. How nice he is! We talked magic. . . . A. C. B. was delightful.

"Do you know anything of my brother *Arthur's* short stories?" he asked a friend. "'The Isles of Sunset,' 'The Hill of Trouble'? They are as charming as he is. He is a Quietist of a kind, which is the next best thing to a Catholic."

"I don't know what a Quietist is," came the unlooked-for retort, "but I can't imagine a brother being charming."

real one for him." This piece of dissection is unique in the diary, but so, I confess, was its object. Benson proved mistaken in his man; and it is odd that at the head of this page he writes: "To be sometimes shrewd in summing up is a grievous gift; though not so grievous as to think one has it when one has not."

Hugh Benson, who was whimsically distressed when advised by his publishers that he must not produce "more than two books a year," was amused on his side at the immense literary activity of his brothers.

"Arthur," he wrote one May 8th, "is taking a short rest from complete books; he is only doing articles at about three a day. . . ."

". . . I think it is hard," Miss Benson on her side wrote, during a brief interspace of silence, "that with three brothers there should be nary a new book ready for me this week. It must be Self-Denial week. Did you see 'Signs of the Times'? 'Self-Denial week—Mr. A. C. Benson refrains from publishing a book.'"

When, however, *The Thread of Gold* appeared, Hugh Benson wrote to his elder brother :

I wish it was possible to explain how much I like it and believe it all. Really, I believe it *all*, and what I believe besides does not appear to me in the least exclusive of it. You contrast ecclesiasticism with the spirit; there is a certain sort of ecclesiasticism that I also loathe; but the kind in which I believe appears to me to stand in relation to the spirit, as the body to the soul; which are theoretically irreconcilable, and yet are united. Certainly also I believe that the body, unless one takes care, cramps the spirit; yet that does not hinder it from its being meant to be the instrument.

And I should like to say here, once for all, that, as with others, Hugh grew gentler and more mellow in his disagreements, so with Mr. A. C. Benson especially it became increasingly clear that the slight sense, perceptible at first, of being in some subtle way "at war," faded, and a complete and serene sympathy ended by reigning between the two.

Hugh's allusion to bathing with Mr. E. F. Benson is my excuse for a short digression.

All his life he had had an almost fantastic love for



bathing. Cambridge restored to him facilities for this, and whatever else is omitted from his diary, accurate notes of his bathes are always there.

"Water . . ." he once wrote to a friend at Oxford, "I love it and fear it, and think I shall be drowned; and would like to live in a pile-dwelling at the mouth of a river." And a little later :

"I envy you (Parson's Pleasure). Here we have only a narrow stream with a shed along it, boarded sides and continual boats of hen-women going up and down. It is miserable. Yet water is water; and there are swings behind the shed and so on. And hardly ever anybody there. I love bathing on a thundery day, with indigo clouds."

"I bathe every day," he writes to another correspondent, "either in Christ's College bath (which is heavenly. Have you ever seen it?) or at the ordinary place. But there generally are some bounders at this last place, who howl and splash and throw a beastly ball from one to the other. Why aren't they content with water and sky and air?"

And in letter after letter you will read that, whatever else may have to be sacrificed, his daily bathe must remain inviolate. Nor will you probably find elsewhere any more enthusiastic panegyric of this exercise than where, in *Initiation*, Nevill exults in the water with the small boy Jim :

He turned on his back as he came up to the foot of the little eighteen-inch fall, just in that mystical part of a current, which, itself almost motionless, is quick with a strange, thrilling vitality from the plunge of air and water beneath—where the myriad bubbles rise hissing and hushing, and the surface of the water curves and heaves a little. (It is just behind that, by the way, that the trout lie and wait for the food that comes so fresh and enticing down the fall, right down to their level a foot or two above the bed of the stream.)

He shifted slowly from place to place, his head right

back in the water, keeping himself afloat by slow paddling with his hands on either side. A film of water washed over his face once or twice, and he closed his eyes. Then with a rush against his limbs, the current caught him, and he whirled down, smiling, still with closed eyes, till all motion ceased. His eyelids glowed before his eyes, red and flaming, against the bright sky. His physical ecstasy was at its height.

His holiday expeditions took him, however, farther afield than what might be reached by bicycle or river, and he begins now his series of visits to noted Catholic houses.

Already in the August of 1904 he had been to Killarney House at the invitation of the late Countess of Kenmare. From it he had ecstatically written to Miss Kyle :

It is so delightful being here. The whole place breathes faith. The trees and stones and mountains look different, as one realises that everyone who looks at them looks through them, except a few chilly tourists. I went round to see some poor people this morning with Lady Castlerosse, and saw such amazing things—people in the most hopeless pig-sties, cobbled stones on the floor, hens running about, and indescribable filth ; real saints lying on the beds, with all their supernatural friends' portraits on the shelf—crucifix, Our Lady, St. Patrick, and so on. One woman was dying of cancer, beaming. Another dying of some other awful thing—calling everyone 'darling,' myself included, and absolutely serene with happiness. They don't mind death or pain *at all*. It is as natural to suffer and die, as to live, and has the advantage of being supernatural too. . . . I wish I had the thousandth part of their chance of heaven. They seem like the real Royal Family of heaven.

In the September of 1905 it was once more at Killarney he was to have his holiday.

I am off to Ireland again in August to Killarney ; large house, a *lovely* chapel, unlimited trout-fishing!!!! Such jolly boys too. Last year two of them, aged nine and seven (A. and B.) were coming out of chapel ; A. forgot to adore. B. told him to go back and do it, "Otherwise," he

said, "Our Lord would think it so very odd!" Isn't that nice?

Here, too, he was initiated into deer-stalking.

"Here," another time he wrote, "all goes along. I shot my first stag yesterday after a six hours' stalk. But I felt a murderous devil. The stalk was glorious. We lay three hours under the shelter of a rock, with half a dozen lordly stags and vicious, trumpet-eared hinds within 300 yards, all against the sky-line [here a sketch follows], and then went on again in despair at 4 P.M. for 1½ hour crawl, at last getting to the top of a rock, whence we could see two small stags, unshootable, at 60 yards. Then we had to descend noiselessly, three men and a dog, and work round again; and at half-past five,

BANG!

He ran 50 yards and lay down, shot within an inch of the right spot; and then I finished him. Oh! I was so unhappy!

"But really the stalk compensated almost; it was honest skill against skill.

"I used my host's rifle, wore his clothes, used his man and dog, ate from his luncheon-case, drank from his flask, and killed his stag!"

This incident is perhaps the only one which he describes at any length in his diary, and you will find it all reproduced in *Loneliness*. "I felt a murderer," he concludes his story, "both times. Yet the arguments for it all are unanswerable." All the letters which he received, during their boyhood, from the sons of Killarney House, show how keenly he had interested himself in every part of their sport, shooting, fishing, and riding. And as for the house: "It is like a palace in a dream," he cries; "I think I should go mad with joy if it were mine." He was the last priest to say Mass in it. Killarney House was most tragically burnt down in 1914. His gratitude, all his life, to these friends was unlimited.

On July 20 he went to the house at Chenies, Rickmansworth, of Adeline, Duchess of Bedford, a very old friend of the Archbishop's and of Mrs. Benson. "I had room over chapel," he notes, "and dreamt fiercely of E. W. B."

"Oh! This place!" he wrote to Mr. Rolfe. "Great sloping lawns under vast trees; brick, oak-edged steps everywhere; pergolas; brick platform; sun-dial; water-lily pool; a broad shallow trout-stream running beneath bridges; ring-doves; a thunderous fall; masses of flowers; and charming house lined with white-painted wood; a heavenly mausoleum and chapel with people on tombs in scarlet and crowns and pointed beards."

"It is almost too perfect," he adds in his diary, in which this description is practically reproduced. He notices little else, save the names of his fellow-guests and the topics of their "jaws," which were largely psychic. His comments are sharper in this brief diary than in his books, and much more hard than in his ordinary conversation.

Of him his hostess has written to me that, "the French expression '*L'esprit toujours en jeu*,' remains with me as I picture him at Killarney and at Tremans, where we met sometimes. He was always lovable and always living"; and it was she who, in speaking to me of the Abbé Huvelin, applied to Hugh Benson his most luminous direction: "*Il faut respecter le type, que Dieu cherche à produire en nous.*" It was impossible for Hugh to be just *any* sort of priest. It would be a grave injustice to seek to paint any conventionalised portrait of him. Plato well saw that the artist's portrait of the actual thing is twice removed from that Ideal which is the really Real: a writer can but pray that he may not contribute wilfully towards making the chasm yawn unnecessarily wide.

Another house which profoundly impressed him was

the late Sir Henry Paston Bedingfeld's place at Oxburgh. He protested that he would prefer to possess this rather than Killarney itself.

To Oxburgh. Oh!!!! . . . a great red house, with a moat, towers, (yard-dog), Cromwell armour in towers. . . . Portraits beyond belief! . . . The King's room, a great brick-floor place, high, with fourteenth-century tapestry, a vast bed, worked by Mary Queen of Scots; a haunted room, really, with the portrait of the woman who haunts, an Italian.

It is this house which appears in *The Sentimentalists* as Mr. Rolls's. It may be remembered that one of his greatest spiritual triumphs was to live *detached* from it. Perhaps this is a hint as to Father Benson's own spiritual practice of deliberate freedom of the heart from what he so fearlessly enjoyed.

At other times his enjoyment was less frantic, so to say, but perhaps more satisfying. He stayed twice at Melbourne Hall, near Derby, the home of Lord Walter Kerr, in 1906 and 1908, and wrote that his hosts had succeeded in fitting into his visit everything which, to his mind, made a perfect holiday. Oddly enough, he had just written a short article in *M.A.P.*, called "My Ideal Holiday." He insisted on having it cut out and stuck into the visitors' book, and signed it "correct." It tallied in every point with what the imaginative courtesy of his hosts had provided for him. It is to these visits that is owed the idea of those brass rubbings which you can see at Hare Street. He made the days delightful with infantine games of his own invention; he would hide, crow like a cock, and lead the farm folk into anxious belief that the poultry run had been left open; and at night the lawns would become populous with the ghosts his stories raised.

" . . . I must write and thank you immensely," he ex-

claims, "for that delightful week. I don't know when I have enjoyed a week more. It is just the kind of thing that one so seldom gets, and which is, as *M.A.P.* relates, my very ideal of a holiday. I look back to it, from the dust and confusion of bellowing in a pulpit and from the prospect of more bellowing, as a person suffocating under water looks to the light! (I do hate myself in a public capacity!)"

His early books had achieved for him a definite literary position. A Benson school begins to form itself. Descendants of historical characters mentioned by him will write to him. One enthusiast makes a pilgrimage, through Kent and Sussex, to all the places mentioned in his books. He himself visited Winchester, at the suggestion of Father Walter Cooksey, to obtain local colour in that unique city for a book on its Catholic history, which Father Cooksey was anxious he should write.<sup>1</sup> Another correspondent begged that he would write a story upon Reading Abbey, in view of dramatisation, or at least of a pageant. This idea, too, appealed to him strongly. More efficacious was the request of the late Dr. Wilkinson,<sup>2</sup> Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, who wrote from Ushaw, suggesting a play on the lines of Wiseman's *Hidden Gem*, written for the Ushaw Jubilee. Benson's was to be acted for the Ushaw Centenary in 1908, and this, in fact, took place, the play being *The Cost of a Crown*, referred to below.

Even when he could not make immediate, or any,

<sup>1</sup> I think this visit occurred before *The Queen's Tragedy* was written. In that case, the information he collected was fully utilised.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Wilkinson was a man of singular charm and old-world courtesy. He was educated at Harrow, and was a very old convert of Newman's; and few of the letters Benson ever received seem to me so full of the fragrance of faith and of affection as do his. The affection was fully returned; Benson gave a retreat at Ushaw, and can find no words too strong for the expression of his admiration of that college. The spirit of devotion, coupled with freedom, which reigned there impressed him most profoundly, and he very frequently recurs to it. I find nothing in his allusions to other centres of Catholic ecclesiastical study quite parallel to it. He preached, too, at the Centenary on July 29, 1908.

use of these suggestions of new novels and of plays, he invariably answered with instant courtesy :

"Your notes," he wrote to one correspondent, "are most suggestive and ingenious ; but I must put them away in a drawer, literally and metaphorically, and see what happens, before I can have the faintest idea whether I can use them or not. One must let that kind of thing simmer."

Another direct consequence of his historical work was the immense increase in the number of reviews he was asked to write. Mr. Belloc allows me to quote from a letter he addressed on August 1, 1907, to Mr. A. C. Benson :

I will send books, as you suggest, to your brother. I have met him once or twice, and liked him enormously. His historical work has always seemed to me unique. It is quite on the cards that he will be the man to write some day a book to give us some sort of idea what happened in England between 1520 and 1560. No book I ever read has given me the slightest conception, and I have never had time to go into the original stuff myself. This is the most interesting of historical problems after the transformation of Gaul in the ninth and tenth centuries.

In the *Dublin Review* his reviews became quite a regular feature. Signed with the single initial *B*, they are easily recognisable as his even without this hint, by a certain vivacity of tone which does not exclude the evidence of real reflection and shrewdness of judgment, and sometimes by a sort of staidness which but lightly veils a bubbling fund of humour. His mockery is always delicate and not unkind. It was this constant reviewing which so rapidly augmented his library. A certain number of volumes he inherited from his father, and to distinguish the two classes of books there, is an easy and rather amusing occupation.

Compliments now befell him. Local Catholic literary

clubs elected him honorary member. After no long time he wrote to his mother :

I have been, and am, beside myself with work. Now, please remark, I have been asked to write a chapter in the new Cambridge History of English Literature—there's glory!—on the effect of the dissolution of the monasteries upon learning and letters.

But the most astonishing recognition reached him from America. In July, 1907, the Chair of English Literature in the Catholic University of America was offered to Father Benson, by cable, by Cardinal Gibbons, and in September a fuller offer was promised, from the Board of Directors, through Archbishop Keane. The salary was to be £400. He felt himself unable to accept this flattering offer.

More and more, therefore, he grew to find that writing was his true vocation. I hope to speak of each book separately, in its place. The following extracts show his attitude towards this occupation as a whole.

"I am really sorry you don't like it," he wrote to an author-friend, who found sheer writing irksome. "It appears to me that writing is the only possible occupation. . . . It is certainly the nearest thing to Creation in this created world, except perhaps Mass and mental prayer."

And to another friend, who had asked what he best of all liked doing, "Saying Mass," he replied, "and then, perhaps, writing my novels."

Undoubtedly his output was enormous, and he was soon able to deal high-handedly with his publishers.

"It is a blessed and a holy life," he writes to Father G. W. Hart, "and I am so happy I don't know what to do. It is almost too happy; and my books are selling like blazes, and publishers are positively clamouring, and giving me higher and higher terms. I have *The King's Achievement* coming out in September, and have also finished *The Queen's Tragedy*, *The Hermit and the King*,



an article on the Sanctity of the Church for a symposium,<sup>1</sup> and a book of ghost stories. I have so terrified Isbister with my pride and arrogance that he is coming up here to interview me this week. Money is going to *roll* in, and I shall save and save till I make my college in the country, ten years hence, with holy literary laymen to come and live with me—each with two rooms—and a hall and a chapel.

"Oh, dear me! It is all too good to be true; but it is true—more or less."

I shall try to consider the writings of this period in three groups: first, the two "modern novels," *The Sentimentalists* and *The Conventionalists*; then those two sensational *tour de force*, *Lord of the World* and *The Dawn of All*; finally, the smaller books, *The Papers of a Pariah* and *St. Thomas of Canterbury*, remain. As for the sermons, *The Religion of the Plain Man*, those shall be spoken of in a later chapter.

## II

In the July of 1905 comes the first suggestion of what became a famous novel, *The Sentimentalists*. "The publishers," he is complaining on this side and on that, "are telling me I ought not to publish more than two books a year;" however, "I am contemplating a modern novel. . . . Fiction is the ONLY thing people care about now." In this case, however, it was to be fiction with a most singular and unequal admixture of fact, for the chief character contained so large a proportion of recognisable features that all kinds of false rumours, with very practical and disastrous results, came into existence about this book. It seems to be demanded, by sheer equity, that I should try to state the facts of the case with accuracy. I am grateful for the friendship of "Chris Dell," who has not hesitated

<sup>1</sup> In *Ecclesia*, edited by A. H. Mathew, 1906.

to make this possible and indeed easy for me to manage.

Benson hesitated a good deal as to what to call his book; *The Waster* at first appealed to him, though its ultimate title, and even *The Conventionalists*, suggested themselves at once as alternatives. His aim was, anyhow, clear from the beginning.

My new book's out, by the way [this was *The Queen's Tragedy*], and selling gloriously—three thousand before publication. That's all right, isn't it? Did I tell you about my yet more new one? to be called, probably, *The Sentimentalists*—modern times—relating the reformation of a *poseur* (Chris Dell) by brutality. Sometimes I think it Extremely Good, and sometimes Extremely Bad.

It's certainly one of the two, and I don't know which.

In September he announced:

I have begun *The Waster*, but I am seriously concerned as to whether it will be possible to publish it. It is the grossest caricature of X. I can say honestly that it is not him, but a violent parody of him.

. . . HONESTLY, it has already ceased to be him. It is his dramatic element, caricatured to absurdity, and practically none of his virtues, which are many.

And a little later:

*The Waster* is sailing ahead. It is perfectly brutal . . . indeed, it is the grossest distortion of X.

In October he tells Miss Benson that

*The Waster* (or *The Sentimentalists*) goes along, but is halting just now. I have shaved off the mystic's whiskers, and given him a face and voice like the Bishop of St. Andrews. He has also killed his wife, thirty-five years before, by neglect, gambling, &c., so he knows what he's about in curing people. . . .

I have a scene so awful, when the engagement between the Waster and the girl is broken off, that I don't think I CAN publish it in my own name.

And on November 16 this extraordinary man could write :

Half an hour ago I finished my book. It will probably not be called *The Waster*. Perhaps *The Conventionalists*. I am not sure. I really am all right. It is perfectly true ; though I dare say reviews will say that I make a deal of fuss about nothing, but I don't think that they will deny its truth. I have employed a device of Henry Kingsley's at the end—suddenly telling the story from my point of view, and relating what I saw happen at a garden party, with which the thing ends. It makes it startlingly real—as if a statue suddenly moved.

In December he delightedly informs his mother :

[Chris Dell] is now engaged on a novel in which I—I—appear! And I am criticising. But how shall I ever have the face to bring out mine with him in it? Fortunately, I think I have persuaded him of what is a fact—that he is not he, but a monster sprung from one aspect of him. Oh! I want to read it to you so much.

In January he reads it aloud at Tremans, “with amazing success. . . . It IS A BOOK. . . .”

And in another letter he repeats :

It is an amazing, moving book—the people, so to speak, laugh and cry and shiver all at once. Oh! it is a BOOK.

Of course he has to remodel it a little, and on June 28, 1906, he writes to Mrs. Benson :

Now I am setting to at *The Sentimentalists* again—you know, that's really not a bad book; I see it wants just a little doctoring for the sake of “Weak Brethren,” and it's going to get it.

Lor! It's better than I thought, and I wasn't exactly humble about it before. Really, I can hardly believe it didn't all happen just so. Mr. Stirling<sup>1</sup> simply moves, and speaks of himself. How cross his brethen will be! I am correcting furiously, but only details, because the facts are simply facts. . . .

<sup>1</sup> This is an Anglican clergyman who figures in the book.

The story has value for its character-drawing and its theory. The plot can be recalled in a very few paragraphs.

Dick Yolland was a priest of unusual history, inasmuch as his father, though a convert, had educated him at Winchester. His home was Georgian and stolidly magnificent, and even his presbytery and parish were managed on no penurious lines. He looked like "an intelligent Irish terrier"; his room was a "palimpsest" in which a tale of worldly tastes, visible in Louis Quinze table, Khelim hearth-rug, antlers, and silver candlesticks, could be read, as it were across the writing which his ecclesiastical state had superimposed upon it; and he was the chief—oh, by far and far the chief—of the Sentimentalists, after whom the book is called. To him Christopher Dell—an Oxford convert, a fervent Catholic, who burned, none the less, red lamps to Hermes, and believed in the gods, and had spells of wild Parisian licence, eked out an intermittent income by journalism, and meditated suicide although unable to sacrifice his Boccaccio, his silk pyjamas, and his china snuff-box—appealed when all else, it seemed, had failed him.

"I do not ask much from the gods," he said. "A little plain food, and shelter over my head, a little red wine to drink, and cigarettes to smoke, decent clothes to wear—I am content with that, but—well, I have not got it."

Dick Yolland rescued him, and obtained for him, first, a pretence of occupation as his father's librarian at Amplefield, then a post on the *Saturday Express*, for which he was to write articles on Italy.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in Father Benson's novels, then, we have the lovingly detailed picture of a country house, its bedrooms, its servants, and

<sup>1</sup> Full, by the way, of the identical phrases which adorned Father Benson's own letters, written from Naples, not two years ago.

its park. You are introduced to old Mr. Yolland, a grave and kindly Catholic ; to Mrs. Hamilton, the first of a series of incarnations of that Suitability which, more than all else, Benson felt to slay the spirit ; to her daughter Annie, a not unsympathetic study of immature girlishness ; her seventeen-year-old cousin Jack, from Eton ; and Lord Brasted, a motoring peer. You know at once what you are to think of Brasted by Benson's hatred for his hands. Benson once declared that he looked at people's hands and decided thus upon their character, even before looking at their faces ; and, again, that he distrusted a certain person, because his hands clashed with his face. Not that he neglected faces—

"If X is clean-shaven," he wrote of one friend to another, "you will see his soul in his mouth ; if he is not, you may possibly form a slightly wrong impression of him from his eyes."

In a series of scenes these various personalities are brought into contact. Chris, with his exotic charm, conquers them all except Brasted. Annie falls in love with him, and he with her. Mrs. Hamilton, incredible to relate, long ago had fallen victim, and so had Jack. Chris was asked to stay at Hinton Hall.<sup>1</sup> The inevitable happened. Chris and Annie engaged themselves, and Mrs. Hamilton, marvelling at herself, "allowed it."

For six weeks of repentant and grateful bliss, punctuated with violent quarrels, Chris lived with Dick, and wrote. Then Lord Brasted, having collected evidence as to Dell's past iniquities, which nobody really troubled to deny, announced to Mrs. Hamilton that a marriage between him and her daughter was clearly quite impossible. Mrs. Hamilton agreed. Everybody met at Hinton. There

<sup>1</sup> Benson had this extraordinary way of introducing names of places and persons familiar in his real life into his books.

was an appalling scene: Chris grovelled on the floor; Annie dismissed him; and the reclaimed wastrel vanished once more, renouncing everybody in turn. He had now learnt, he swore, what to believe, both about God and man.<sup>1</sup>

However, a Mr. John Rolls lived not far off in a superb and ancient house called Foxhurst. He was old, wealthy, *grand seigneur*, a penitent (his sins had killed his wife half a lifetime ago), and a mystic. At Foxhurst he created, for the good of their souls, that "colony of cranks" which Father Benson already, while at Llandaff House, so eagerly proposed to form. Ex-actresses, ex-priests, all manner of strange world's-failures came there for his unerring re-creation. Indeed, it was he who had saved Annie, hysterical to snapping-point after her dismissal of Chris Dell. It was he who now undertook the salvation of that unlucky man, discovered in a sordid Westminster street after another sulphurous sojourn in Paris. Annie had failed, Dick had failed; love, that is, and innocence had failed. "The man," Mr. Rolls decided, "must be broken to pieces." Brutality must do what gentleness could not. Chris was sent for, and resigned himself, not unwillingly, to an "aristocratic retreat" in these exquisite surroundings, untenanted now, save by his host and himself. Rolls trapped him in his talk: all he asked, Chris had assured

<sup>1</sup> I believe Mrs. Hamilton honestly felt Chris's moral history to be more of a barrier to marriage than his temporary sojourn in a workhouse. She was a really religious woman; but Father Benson is constantly driving home his creed that even in religion—perhaps especially there—you can be unwittingly conventional and unchristian. One of his own friends, not "Chris Dell," was once in a panic lest his acquaintance some-time with the workhouse should cause a rupture.

"I don't really understand about the workhouse," Father Benson answered, "or how you can call it a stigma. May I say quite plainly that I cannot conceive of anyone with whom I wished to have anything to do . . . regarding it as any kind of a bar under any kind of circumstances? I do not exaggerate when I say I regard it as I regard a wound received in a battle."

him, was a room in a rustic cottage, hard work, no literature ; "make me as one of thy hired servants." He should have all that, Mr. Rolls announced. Either let him avow himself a *poseur* ; worse, a liar ; or let him take an under-gardener's job, and prove or make himself a true man.

More or less supervised by the head-gardener and the chaplain, who lived in the same cottage, Dell began his new life, and almost lost his sanity. Besides, everyone knew about him. The vicar of Foxton had told the vicar of Hinton, and he had informed Jack Hamilton, who told his aunt, and she told Annie. But Annie herself was growing suitable—was "coarsened," Mr. Rolls plainly put it ; and she was, in the main, just sorry for this young man who once used to "write," and had now come down to being under-gardener. She resolved to pray for him, an occupation which Mrs. Hamilton could not forbid, though she regretted it. Finally it was decided just to leave Chris Dell to God. This "brilliant inspiration" closed the episode till Chris reopened it himself. But that was later. Meanwhile Annie, in a paroxysm of suitability, decided to marry Lord Brasted. Rolls forced the frankly hysterical Dick Yolland to announce this fact to Chris in his presence. Chris, who appeared half-hypnotised by Rolls, and utterly refused to talk to Dick or to leave Foxhurst, as Dick proposed and Rolls allowed, had as a matter of fact resolved on suicide. Suicide does almost happen. Dick and John Rolls wait in the midnight cottage outside the room in which Chris is preparing to hang himself. At the very last moment Rolls saves him and Dick faints. The cure is complete, and may be tested. A garden party occurs at Hinton to welcome Lord and Lady Brasted home from the honeymoon. All the county is there. Lady Brasted, looking sixteen, all innocence and

self-possession, receives congratulations. Chris Dell, exquisitely groomed once more, presents himself and his hand. Before all the world she cuts him. He departs serene and unperturbed. He is master of his soul, and the waster is once and for all re-cast into a Man.

If I may try to explain why I feel the "case" of Chris Dell to be a failure, I will assign this to three causes.

First, Father Benson was mistaken in his verdict on his model. This often happened. Benson's very quick eye took in at once certain salient and usually external characteristics of a person who might meet him, and from these his even quicker dramatic imagination constructed a personage often quite unlike what a longer study of the person would have revealed. When, therefore, this person did not proceed to act as the personage would have acted, Benson was baffled, and often not a little aggrieved.

Second, Chris Dell is not even a pure caricature. Unconsciously to himself, but very clearly to anyone who may have read his correspondence of this period, Benson was infusing into this character elements belonging not in the least to its original, but to another and far more sinister person of his acquaintance. Really Chris Dell is a composite photograph, in which a predominant part, no doubt, is a caricature of a certain person, and this, at worst, is the irresponsible, volatile, "pagan" part; the monstrous and really morbid residue is derived from another source, and to my feeling the two could not possibly have been fused. Hence, psychologically, Chris is not only a caricature, but a dual personality which will not work harmoniously within itself. Dual personalities exist, and presumably can be drawn, but Benson was not meaning to draw one.

Finally, Benson was too sane to portray a true decadent. Even the pose of paganism he does not quite understand,



though he plays with it himself. "I am delighted you are a proper pagan," he wrote to the secondary person who composed "Chris Dell"; "but surely all sound Catholics must be that. I seemed to learn that in Rome." He never worked out the idea; I will try to recur to it below. "External" as I feel his studies of women to be, the would-be picture of a decadent is even less "from within"; he scarcely recognised the type, when he met it, for what it was, so little could his imagination sympathise, emotionally, with the corrupt and sick. He almost felt with Huysmans; but he would never, I maintain, have thoroughly understood d'Annunzio. In consequence he may have failed to be a certain sort of artist; but I suppose he was, for that, a better sort of man. His soul learnt what it was to suffer, but not from interior decay.

No sooner had the book appeared than its author found himself involved in many perplexities. A number of those who recognised the original of "Chris Dell," and were rightly jealous for his good name, and bore other and yet more gentle feelings towards him, felt he had been wronged, and, as Benson kept repeating, caricatured. Benson, bombarded by indignant letters, was for writing disclaimers in the papers, and experienced many very bad half-hours. Worse, there were those who now supposed that unplumbed depths of iniquity had all the while existed in one of whom they (quite rightly) had suspected no such thing. They therefore broke off relations, in many cases, with the "Dell" for whom Benson had exerted himself, and long was to exert himself, with an energy and generosity beyond all promise.

It is manifestly impossible for me to explain in detail how, or why, Hugh Benson had expended his best endeavours on behalf of one whose gratitude and affection had,

on their side, been of the keenest. No friendship, I confess, in which Hugh was partner could go for long unruffled; none which he shared with "Chris" would endure a month without squall and storm. Yet in the relations of these two men had been much which was, beyond all that is ordinary, fine and inspiring. It may be guessed, then, how appalled Hugh was when, to his amazement, he heard what consequences were arising from his book.

"Chris Dell" himself was alternately inclined to treat the whole affair with that breezy good nature which is so noticeably his, or, in his moments of fatigue, with anger, not against Hugh, but against his critics.

"As you say," he wrote, "'What donkeys people are!' Please take no notice of anything people say—I don't mind . . . though you will admit Chris is not a fascinating person, and I am sorry that people recognise me in him. There must be a fund of iniquity in me of which I am not yet conscious. 'To see ourselves as others see us.' I am unable to quote the egregious Burns in his native Doric. Go on with your dramatisation and with everything else. Label 'Chris' X.Y.Z. if it so please you, and I do not mind that. I was going to say 'Dear man,' but I am afraid of being or saying anything that 'Chris' says or does. But, for God's sake, don't put anything in the papers. Let asses say or think what they will. Tremans knows, and my other friends know. That is enough."

And at last, somewhat exasperated, on July 11, he repeats:

I notice you remind me of the circumstances under which your book was written—how that you asked my permission, and gave me the power to veto it. My dear Hugh, if I have related the circumstances once to unkind critics, I have related them a thousand times. If people will be such blazing fools as utterly to misunderstand after all the lengthy explanations I have given, I cannot help it. I had no idea people were so malicious or so unreasonable. Let them go. You all know how the book was published, and that is enough.

I think it will not be denied that "Chris Dell" acted with extreme forbearance and generosity, and, if I may say so, humour. He knew too, by many kinds of experience, how to interpret the exigencies of a temperament in many points artistic.

Finally, on January 28, 1907, he says :

You are worrying yourself most unnecessarily about me, I assure you. . . . I am laughing at the absurdity of the whole thing, though I must confess I was rather amazed when I heard that everybody recognised me in Chris. It was rather a blow to my *amour propre*. . . .

You will, I hope, reap a rich harvest of shekels from the whole transaction, and the world will forget *The Sentimentalists* when it stands wondering before *The Lord of the World*."

He repeated one or two slight criticisms, together with a suggestion for the dramatised edition of the book then in view :

"I should be much more likely to carry a Catullus or Tibullus about instead of the Boccaccio. I feel I shall hate your man. He is bound to have all my hateful qualities. Do hang him in the end. I am sure he deserves it."

Elsewhere he declares that "conversion" is far too Philistine an ending.

As for the censure which the book brought down upon its author from others less immediately interested in it than its hero, I must confess that most of the criticism seems to me to indicate a falsified perspective. Father Benson himself could laugh at much of it. Especially he ridiculed the eagerness of some lady readers that he should write the expletive so grateful to an Englishman, only with the omission of its last three letters. A very clever critic pleased him by recognising that Chris Dell's sojourn in Paris, about which the nervous readers made so loud a fuss, was far less significant than other hints which pre-

sumably escaped them. Still, it was regretted that his book could not be put into the hands of the young person, of whom, in real life, Hugh did as a matter of fact stand in a kind of angry awe. However, he makes his own intention clear again and again, except that he unconsciously shows that he does not feel "Chris Dell" to be so much of a caricature after all. This confusion within his own mind I have attempted to explain. Meanwhile he writes:

October 8 [1907].

*Sentimentalists.* I am getting both praise and blame. I wrote it deliberately with a view to a certain class of *poseur* whom I come across continually—wanting to show them what wicked idiots they are. I do agree that, apart from the supernatural, their reformation, psychologically speaking, is impossible. But by grace they are cured again and again.

And to another:

I am getting such curious letters about *The Sentimentalists*. An eminent Jesuit has written to tell me that he likes it more than any book I have ever written, and that he is quite sure it will do [nothing but] good. That is very cheering. He says that the treatment of "Chris" reminds him of his own novitiate.<sup>1</sup> The reviews differ violently—exactly as real people do about the very character who is the original of "Chris." That too shows that at least I have been truthful to the original.

And he comes to close quarters with the question when he declares that his object in this book was to show how alone a weak, sentimental character can be made strong.

Further, it is a *bad* character—exactly that kind of man whom the world despises and our Lord desires to save.

Now if I had entirely expurgated the book, the character simply would not be that kind of man at all. It is of no use to draw a sham figure, if one wants to deal with realities.

I did not ask myself if it would make converts, but rather whether it would make things any more hopeful for

<sup>1</sup> I surmise that Benson took this as the mild jest for which it presumably was intended.

the thousands of souls who are going straight to hell because no one understands them or makes the best of them. . . .

I don't know what the good of being in union with our Lord is, unless we try to do what He did—*i.e.* make *the best of sinners, and not the worst*—and, above all, never expect gratitude, and never allow the faintest self-love or bitterness or resentment to remain in one's heart. [. . .] All that you have done for God's poor is very pleasing to Him; but if you want to do *eternal* good to them, you must not expect gratitude (though, of course, you may thank God when it comes), that [*sic*] you must not expect advanced graces from beginners, or modes of expression which are beyond them.

And undoubtedly the book brought him many pitiful letters. They came from two classes: one, hopeful—"Be a Mr. Rolls to me"; the other, wearied by unsuccess—"Is all this true, or does it only happen in books?" It was partly true, at any rate. His *letters* formed very often a kind of spiritual co-efficient without which, for instance, hospital nurses and doctors could not undertake certain patients—a morphia-maniac, for example. Benson became a very powerful administrator of suggestion. He lodged his image in a sick brain and set up new associations of ideas and dissolved the old ones, and thus rendered, I think, incalculable services in definite cases. "Your books," one said, "are spiritual experiences. They take possession of me and walk with me for days."

I have dwelt at length upon *By What Authority* and *The Sentimentalists* because each was the first in a series of somewhat similar novels and set a style. Still, *The Conventionalists* marks an immense advance upon its immediate predecessor. *The Sentimentalists* exacted a sequel. Miss Benson had written that it

hasn't only the interest of making you want to go on, but also of making you want to stop and think through again what you have read. It hadn't quite the *aroma* of

some of your books ; and there are one or two sentences which seem to me as clever as you please, but a little less *fine* than your own style. I think now that it would not only admit but *need* a sequel. You can't live happily ever afterwards just yet.

Father Benson first of all had pictured Chris in a seminary. Later, he will let fall upon his shoulders the mantle of Mr. Rolls.

*The Conventionalists* begins with a Prologue which contains a picture of London at daybreak so perfect that I can recollect to equal it only R. L. Stevenson's unforgettable pages in one of *The Dynamiter* stories, and Wordsworth's sonnet upon Westminster Bridge. "Dear God, the very houses seem asleep. . . ." But the story begins later when Algy Banister, second son of the *Conventionalist* family, arrives at Crowston, his home, there to meet once more Miss Mary Maple, that wise young lady, out for a husband, but at present determined to have "no nonsense with younger sons," and to bag Mr. Theo, Algy's elder brother. But it is Mary Maple's face that has set Algy to wander at 4 A.M. through London, and the early part of the book is chiefly taken up with the love affairs of Mary, Algy, Sibyl Markham, and the youngest Banister boy, Harold. Love, in *The Sentimentalists*, was frankly hysterical in Annie and maniac in Chris. Here, for the first time, Father Benson gives himself full scope in detailing its normal processes. Also he is bolder in his study of feminine types. It is a purely external study, I confess, as un-Meredithian as possible ; and, after what he feels to be a successful page or two of conversation between Mary, say, and Annie Brasted (who returns into this novel), he concludes with an onlooker's appreciation : "It was all

very feminine." You are all the while conscious that the characters are being put through their paces for the sake of the audience, and do or say little save *in order to* reveal more fully the type to which they belong. In his family (over the details of whose behaviour in their country house Father Benson lingers and lingers, *captus dulcedine*), Algy moves as something of an ugly duckling, ridiculous in the eyes of the Conventionalists even when he does do the proper thing, and, for instance, tries to knock down the poacher who wants to kiss Miss Markham. He fails, and gets laughed at; but herein is his first lesson, almost, that Intention, and not Achievement, counts; and the boy who, owing to his love, had "rediscovered God," passes yet further from attention to mere doing towards the mystery of *Being*. . . . It is the rather sudden death of his elder brother from appendicitis which drives him farther back towards the spiritual and eternal, the True Light behind the kaleidoscope.

On 2nd April 1906 Benson writes:

Really my book on Algy is beginning to take proper shape in my mind. The spiritual world is going to come up like a thunderstorm, appallingly real; it is going to carry Algy away to the Carthusians, and leave everybody staring at one another like fools. It will really make a book.

Now, in all this episode of Theo's death, tribute must be rendered to Benson's really terrible gift of irony. In *The Sentimentalists* there had been a good deal of banter; "suitability" had been jeered at, but not unaffectionately. . . . Who would have guessed that its author would select—not, thank God, the dying man, but the whole detailed setting of that terrific act of Death, for his most piercing

shafts? The quarrels, the reconciliations, the very prayers of the two younger brothers; the shattered universe of the elders and the parents; the indescribable helplessness of the Vicar. . . . In *The Sentimentalists* the Rev. Mr. Stirling is knocked about a good deal; Father Benson frankly bullies the poor man; but then Father Maples comes in for quite as bad a mauling. Here Mr. Mortimer is scourged till his very soul is laid naked, beneath the blood and bones, for us to espy its futility. The Catholic Lady Brasted will not be gently treated, I own. Benson means to be fair, and is. But she, he implies, has the real thing, however conventional be her grip upon it; the Anglicanism which should consummate its spiritual achievement in this death-bed communion service, is like that idle husk which, in Kipling's famous poem, was torn shred by shred from the shivering soul, till the wind that blew between the worlds went through him like a knife. . . . Not *there* was the Reality. . . . I am saying nothing about the rightness or wrongness of Hugh Benson's evaluation of creeds or rituals. Only, the irony of all this episode appears to me quite terrible.<sup>1</sup>

Algy calling on Father Benson, late at night, in Cambridge (this interview with its background of the University, wakeful too, yet to what different purpose, is exquisitely given), finds that his home-life, his future (marriage especially), have become unthinkable. The world has gone mad; he is now conscious of his soul, and of God. He wants Loneliness with God. Father Benson feeds him on the mystics, and brings him down to Chris

<sup>1</sup> It would be easy to find parallels: Lady Carberry's death-bed in *The Winnowing* is as terrible. Moreover, Algy's career is, at moments, singularly like that of "the Coward" in spiritual quality; and again, like Frank Guiseley's in *None Other Gods*. To re-read these novels quickly in sequence drives home how recurrent are Benson's types.



Dell, now a recluse in Sussex. Dell rebukes his narrowness. The world is not mad, if its denizens are in their vocation. If you, out of your vocation, live among men and women who are in theirs, so out of harmony are your lives that indeed you will, it is true, appear to one another mad. . . . The men take a motor drive, and from a hill-crest Algy discerns Parkminster. What is it? A Carthusian monastery. He visits it, and emerges nervous, finding it "just damnable."

Hereupon Lady Brasted and Dick Yolland, now a Monsignore, undertake between them the care of Algy's soul. All but exasperated by the former, he ends by being "received" by the latter, after resisting, incarnated in his family, that Conventionalism which, in the long run, had no chance against the terrific onset of the supernatural. Here lies the interest of the remainder of the book.

"I have just got," Hugh writes in July, "to the most difficult part—which is to make a contemplative, with no other gifts, interesting."

The whole question is, who shall conquer, and how completely—God, or the world and the flesh, so innocent both of them, as represented by Crowston and Mary Maple, who has transferred her more than half sincere attention to Algy, and will soon be "under instruction" for becoming a Catholic . . . ? The struggle goes forward. To Algy evicted from home and on an allowance of some £250 a year, Crowston grows doubly dear: he revisits it; Mary is there; one half-hour alone with her in the smoking-room teaches his imagination the rest of what he must give up. The voice calls yet more piercingly. "Forget thy people and thy father's house." Algy had come out of that. Let him come farther. Once more

old Mr. Banister has to reel beneath a shock. Chris calls<sup>1</sup> to tell him that Algy is giving up everything in order to gain, at Parkminster, the All. Mary marries a wealthy man from Manchester, and abandons her "instruction." . . . From the world's second-best she has collected no mean treasure.

Of this novel I wish to say but little. Its hero, too, was sketched from life, but with a freer hand. Zola claimed, once upon a time, that he had, as novelist, the right to recast the histories of those *miraculées* whom he met at Lourdes, and whose photographs are so recognisable. Benson may from the outset have intended to outline a purely fictitious future for his hero, or he may once more have been mistaken, simply, in his judgment of what ought, or was likely, to happen in this case. Certainly the histories of Algy Banister and his model were sufficiently divergent. This we do not criticise. What lends itself to a somewhat widely felt disapprobation would appear to be the method pursued by Chris, Dick Yolland, and Father Benson in view of ensuring Algy's coming beneath the Carthusian spell. He was jockeyed into it, people declare. It was a popish plot to which he genuinely did succumb. After all, the author has given himself a fair field; granted from the outset that Chris now is some manner of clairvoyant or clairsentient mystic, you must allow him to act with a directness in spiritual affairs not granted, say, to a Dick Yolland, whom in his blunt stupidity of good nature Benson certainly means us to esteem and even love. In him he has caricatured a very tiny portion of himself,

<sup>1</sup> An amusing and very characteristic little anecdote connects itself with this visit. On leaving Victoria, Chris Dell is wearing brown boots: on his arriving at Crowston they are black. "So you see, Father Benson," it was said to him, "he must have changed them in the train. Now why?" Quick as thought came the answer: "To impress Mr. Banister."

recognisable, but not predominant. Whether, in view of this, it was artistic to insert an actual Father Benson into the tale as well, may be doubted. You could hear, however, while reading this book, a new *motif* destined to sound clear through Benson's literary work—that of Vocation. Its artistry, moreover, promised much of beauty in the future, though here, sheer *beauty* is not yet as apparent as it will be. Psychology, moreover, has so advanced as to raise our expectation to the highest.<sup>1</sup>

*The Mirror of Shalott* and *The Papers of a Pariah* created no general reverberation. The next two novels, however, *The Lord of the World* and *The Dawn of All*, came as a rather anxious surprise.

In December, I think, 1905, the late Mr. Frederick Rolfe, author of *Hadrian VII* and of other books, to whom allusion has already been made, drew Father Benson's attention to Saint Simon, not (though some of Father Benson's allusions made me for a moment hesitate) the author of the *Memoirs*, but the founder of French socialism. A vision of a dechristianised civilisation, sprung from the wrecking of the old régime, arose before him, and he listened to Mr. Rolfe's suggestion that he should write a book on Antichrist.

"Yes," he writes to his mother on December 16, 1905, "Russia is ghastly. Which reminds me that I have an idea for a book so vast and tremendous that I daren't think about it. Have you ever heard of Saint Simon? Well, mix up Saint Simon, Russia breaking loose, Napoleon, Evan Roberts, the Pope, and Antichrist; and see if any idea suggests itself. But I'm afraid it is too big. I should

<sup>1</sup> So impressed was one reader by the novel, that he worked out a calendar of dates, of extraordinary complexity, to suit the various events of which it made mention. He did the same for *None Other Gods*, and found, to his distress that dates mentioned in the book itself could not be combined so as to make the story possible upon their basis. He implored a second edition, corrected.

like to form a syndicate on it, but that it is an idea, I have no doubt at all."

To Mr. Rolfe himself he writes on January 19, 1906 :

Antichrist is beginning to obsess me. If it is ever written, it will be A BOOK. Do you know much about the Freemasons ? . . . Socialism ? . . . I am going to avoid scientific developments, and confine myself to social. This election seems to me to hold vast possibilities in the direction of Antichrist's Incarnation—I think he will be born of a virgin. Oh ! if I dare to write all that I think ! In any case it will take years.

He builds up the story out of a contrast ; the adequate Representative of purely human culture is set as self-sufficient, over against the official Representative of the Supernatural. The Catholic Church teaches that man is *called*, by God, to the "supernatural." *Defiance* of the Supernatural by a *natural* civilisation is thus the keynote of the book. Underlying this is the Catholic theology of Nature and Grace, and it must here be very explicitly stated that this theology does not state or imply, and never has done so, that nature as such is bad. Not even "fallen" nature has become, as Calvinists, for instance, teach, positively and formally bad. Humanity, at its very creation, was already "raised" by God to a way of being higher than the merely human, which its intrinsic elements could neither have achieved by themselves, nor claim in justice or even equity. This elevation was not only a free gift of God, but neither conflicted with, sterilised, or disregarded any of the human elements it affected. Man was endowed with a supreme privilege, that, namely, of transcending his human limitations, and entering upon a new mode of existence which shared in some way, not to be stated adequately in any formula or circumscribed by idea, or visioned even by any imagination, in the

existence of the Infinite and Absolute. The appropriation of the full results of this was to be accomplished only after some effort, representative at any rate. Human nature, the Church further teaches, as summed up and "recapitulated" in the person of Adam, culpably rejected this supernatural gift by disobeying in the test set to it; the whole race was thereby reduced, in him, to its purely natural level, where it was left to work out its destiny unaided by certain supernatural graces which it had already enjoyed. This is the Fall. It is not a wrecking of nature, but its stripping of "supernature." Yet no sooner had man cast himself off the supernatural platform on which God had placed him, and replaced himself on his co-natural terrain, than God summoned him to climb back to his supernatural consummation, though by a laborious route, this time, of gradual development—atone-ment having been made for the insult he had offered to God by a second Adam, a second Person who in Himself should sum up the race, namely, God Himself incarnate, known in the days of his flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Sin involves by essence the wilful and conscious rejection of the dominion of God. Now what He authoritatively puts before man is, precisely, the acceptance of the supernatural, incarnate, henceforward, in the person of Jesus Christ. He wills that all men should be saved; and, implicitly at least, men must accept the Saviour. The two ideals which are, then, opposed, are those of the merely natural, in so far as it is chosen against God's recognised will, and the supernatural. Hence there is no human perfection to which the natural may not attain, or appear to attain—theoretically at least; for in practice it is held that for a prolonged success even on the natural terrain, supernatural grace is required. And the supernatural, since the death especi-

ally of the Crucified, need, as yet at anyrate, have no natural beauty about it that we should desire it. In these highly simplified terms Father Benson chooses to present to us the contrast.

Julian Felsenburgh, who is to represent the Antichrist, is to be the quintessence, so to say, of natural perfection. Percy Franklin, the representative of Christianity as such, shall grow indeed in sanctity as he passes from simple priest to Cardinal, and thence to being Pope; but in the artistic simplification to which Benson subjects these two characters, just as Felsenburgh retains nothing whatever of the supernatural, so Franklin will have little, if anything, to display of such natural qualities as dazzle or impress, or even improve, the world.

In two note-books are to be found traces of the gradual growth of the book. In one you find the exterior appearance of these protagonists set down. For Julian's prototype, Benson oddly enough chooses a rather prominent Socialist politician. His description is adequately given in the book itself and needs no reproduction. He adds, however, a few notes, basing himself on Napoleon, to elucidate Antichrist's character. They most of them recur in the book itself, mostly in Part III. He is to be :

King of Kings; King of Words, daughters of earth, and Facts, sons of heaven; terse way of speaking; brief, crisp, exact vocabulary—appetite for literature; astounding memory.

Skill in colouring bulletins.

Telescopic and microscopic eye. "Not everyone can be an atheist."

"Never despise local information."

His weak spot was the neglect of women as a political factor.

Knew no rest save change of occupation.

Weakness was soft heart; he forgave.

He gauged people quickly and adapted himself.

He wrote little with his own hand—dictated.

“The Law should be clean, precise, uniform ; to interpret it is to destroy it.”

He wrote very short sentences.

He was the Redeemer of France, the Creator of Italy.

A splendid egotist, believing that by his own sheer personality the world can best be governed. (It is this that is recognised when he is worshipped.)

Allowed privates to speak for him.

Antichrist corrects these faults ; he recognises woman’s power, committing certain departments to them, and giving them a modified vote . . . and he uses them greatly in education.

He never forgives : for political crime he strips of position, making the man incapable of holding office ; for treachery to himself he drops them out of his councils. . . .

His motto is “Pax non Ensis,” in Esperanto.

*Incidents.*—His complete hardness, and kindness. He imitates nature.

His knowledge of psychology, his mysterious silence to all as regards himself. His occasional melancholy silences and retirements.

But as for Percy Franklin—

*Appearance.*—Grey-haired, thick ; fresh face, extremely bright grey eyes—prominent lower lip ; pointed chin—keenness, characteristic ; active figure ; beautiful hands.

Learnt secret of will—would bend any amount up to a certain point ; then like steel. Any amount of acquaintances ; no intimates ; simply refused ; shook himself gently clear.

Was there ever so deliberate a photograph ?

In another note-book is the first draft of that political view of the world which prefaces the actual narrative, and in which everyone traces the influence of Mr. H. G. Wells. That is there ; but the guiding hand was rather, at this period, Mr. Rolfe’s. His *Hadrian VII* is responsible for a very great deal of *The Lord of the World*, not least the introduction.

The stage-setting of this introduction is old Mr. Templeton's underground room, and the time somewhere, I gather, about 2000 A.D. He recapitulates the happenings of almost a century, to the two priests who talk with him. Communism had begun in England with the Labour Parliament of 1917; in 1929 the Establishment fell; in 1935, the House of Lords. The Creed, the Bible, and belief in Christ's divinity had already floated off. Benson attaches importance, both in note-book and novel, to the *Necessary Trades Bill*, which nationalised most professions; an elaborate reform of the Poor Laws and an Education Bill brought down monarchy, inheritance, and Universities in turn, and established dogmatic secularism. America kept England out of the great Eastern War, at the cost of India and Australia, so that the "Eastern Empire" ended by owning all east of the Urals; "Europe" meant Africa and Europe; the "Republic of America," all that continent.

As for religion, disregarding the vaguely homogeneous group of Eastern cults, nothing was left but Catholicism and Humanitarianism. Protestantism was dead. Supernatural religion confessedly involved an absolute authority, and nothing ever claimed to possess that save the Papacy. But the Papacy was losing its adherents with immense rapidity. Rome, however, had been restored to the Pope, and Ireland was almost wholly Catholic.

The two secondary characters of this book are Oliver Brand, Member for Croydon, and his wife, Mabel: in his house evidence accumulates, fascinating Mabel's mind, of the rising power of one Julian Felsenburgh, whose task appeared to be to tranquillise that now consolidated East which had learnt everything, it appeared, from modern civilisation, save Peace. Would its fanaticism—largely, it appeared, religious—bring back chaos into the world?



Felsenburgh's influence, out yonder, seemed the one hope.

Mabel witnesses a dolor accident : one of the injured passengers is a Catholic, and dies, there in front of her, in the arms of a priest. She is distressed, but Oliver explains to her the gigantic absurdity of Catholicism. Parallel with the false dawn of faith on Mabel's horizon, and its full return to old Mrs. Brand, moves the gradual apostacy of Father Francis, who, with Percy, had sat listening to the tale of the modern world's development. But these are faint ripples only upon the face of a European calm, a calm (the Westminster priests are feeling) like that before the bursting of some mad typhoon. Up the eastern sky the shadow of Felsenburgh climbs steadily.

Oliver Brand, speaking to a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square, is shot at by a Catholic assailant ; almost at the same moment Percy Franklin reconciles the soul of Oliver's dying mother with her God. Felsenburgh, who has but reconciled East with West, is due that night to arrive in London. The world goes mad over Felsenburgh, the Peacemaker ; over the spiritual peace-making no stir is made. Oliver, who catches the priest in his house, is, for a moment, angry ; Mabel soothes him : *what can it possibly matter ?* Christ is negligible, now that Julian is coming.

In a few pages of fine rhetoric, but definitely hysterical, like all the book, the advent of Julian is told. Percy watches it from Westminster. Julian announces, in "Paul's House," a Universal Brotherhood, a Consummation of History, the accomplished Incarnation of the Spirit of the World. The eyes of all were fixed on him, and the hope of all was centred in him, as they were, "centuries ago" (said the reporters), "on one now known to history as Jesus of Nazareth." Mabel, all ecstasy, announces the Kingdom

that is come, and offers to the dying woman, Mrs. Brand, Julian for Jesus, and excludes the priest. She dies, lonely. Against this scene, Father Benson violently sets a picture of Rome, returned, under John XXIV, *Papa Angelicus*, into a deliberate mediaevalism. Catholicism found now in Rome its material focus, as well as its spiritual centre of gravity. Immense suburbs surrounded it, all Catholic; kings flocked to it, the actual Italian Government having migrated to Turin. Percy meets the Pope, whose one policy is the Supernatural. Percy explains London's frantic outburst of Humanity-worship, foretells imminent persecution, demands a New Order, "freer than Jesuits, poorer than Franciscans, more mortified than Carthusians"; but since neither in this book nor elsewhere is the idea of this order worked out, fascinating as was its theme to Benson's special ingenuity, we may leave it to one side.

Almost at the moment of the Pope's Mass, at the moment of quintessential supernaturalism, Felsenburgh, the American, supreme in the East, is announced too President of Europe. The Pope issues an Encyclical, reaffirming the supremacy of the Divine and surmising the imminent revelation, in antagonism, of the Man of Sin, and the End.

Where faith goes out, superstition comes in. Man is a worshipping animal, and Humanity-worship, even in Comte's day, demanded an organised cult. The ex-priest Francis shall be its master-of-ceremonies in chief. Four great feasts shall be observed: Paternity, figured by a colossal naked man; Maternity, corresponding to Christmas; Life, for spring; and Sustenance, replacing, somewhat, midsummer Corpus Christi. The first feast takes place in the disaffected Abbey; a Catholic cries aloud in anguished reprobation; he is silenced. Percy Franklin,

now Cardinal Protector of England, gathers the increasing news of persecution and of plot, for the Catholics determine to blow up the Abbey when the feast of Maternity comes round. A really magnificent description of the night journey, by volor, across the Alps, considered by good judges to be perhaps Benson's finest piece of writing, tells of Percy's return from Rome to London, to denounce, if possible, this plot, thus proving Rome, at least, to be no accomplice. He is too late; the plot has been discovered: he passes on the way a fleet of two hundred volors; they are bound for Rome, to ruin it. Rome is, in fact, destroyed, and with its obliteration, the barriers are on all sides swept away: persecution breaks out in England; churches are wrecked, priests are murdered.

"Antichrist," Benson writes on May 16th, "is going forward; and Rome is about to be destroyed. Oh, it is hard to keep it up! It seems to me that I am getting terser and terser until finally the entire story will end in a gap, like a stream disappearing in sand. There is such a fearful lot that one might say, that every word seems irrelevant."

Mabel has seen a martyrdom. Her soul is in commotion. Not peace, after all, has come. Humanity proves to be a monster, "dripping with blood from claws and teeth." Felsenburgh had failed. Yet at the feast of Maternity, in the Abbey, where the frustrated plot had been intended to make an end of him, his amazing personality conquers not only the willing thousands who acclaim him, but Mabel herself. As he stands before the naked image of the Woman, "the Mother," she feels for a moment, "had found her Son at last," and she swoons while there crashed out "one thunder-peal of worship," and "ten thousand voices hailed him Lord and God."

After this the end comes quickly. Percy is now Pope, all the Cardinals save himself and two others having been

killed in the fall of Rome. Of these, the Patriarch of Jerusalem dies, and Cardinal Steinmann is hanged in Germany. The new Pope lives in Nazareth, looking down upon Megiddo; and for the first time reflections of Hugh Benson's journey in the Holy Land shimmer through his pages. Catholicism still survives, but no more than that. In the Pope's heart grow stronger and stronger precisely the three *supernatural* virtues of faith, when all the past seems ruined; of hope, when no Christian future seems possible; of love, when all the world seems enemy.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that there is but one deadly poison left in the world, according to the worshippers of Felsenburgh-Humanity, and that is, Christianity; alone explicitly in opposition, it must be effaced. A new-created Cardinal turns Judas; Percy's whereabouts are made known; in him Christianity shall be blotted out. Mabel, incapable any longer of supporting the downfall of her dreams, seeks peace in euthanasia, while the darkness of the world's last day closes round her. The volors speed to Nazareth; they hang poised above the Pope at his Mass. Benediction follows; the *Tantum* is intoned. Satan comes; "the earth, rent once more in its allegiance, shrank and reeled in the agony of divided homage."

"Then this world passed, and the glory of it."

And on June 28th the author wrote:

I HAVE FINISHED ANTICHRIST. And really there is no more to be said. It just settles things. Of course I am nervous about the last chapter—it is what one may call perhaps just a trifle ambitious to describe the End of the World. (No!) But it has been done.

Criticisms on this book were many and various. After its perturbing pages I shall be forgiven for quoting once

more from the reassuring writers in the *Alma Mater* magazine of Riverview :

DEAR FATHER BENSON,—Thank you very much for writing such thrilling yarns. They are regular scorchers, especially your *Lord of the World*. I am sure I shall be afraid of the devil in a motor more than ever. I like your end of the world, and I think your idea of a suicide hospital ought to cure queer people pretty quick. I feel sorry you made Mabel turn the handle of the suicide machine, and I think it would be nicer if we were sure Mabel was all right in the end. A postscript would set my mind easy on this point. You are very highly coloured and easy to remember like *Macbeth*. Try your hand at plays—not comic ones, like the *Mikado*, but serious ones with a murder or two in them ; but keep the Pope alive to the end.—Yours affectionately, LIONEL.

The answer was no less straightforward :

DEAR LIONEL,—Thank you very much. . . . Personally, I am more afraid of the devil when he isn't in a motor car. . . . Yes, I think Mabel was all right, really. Honestly, she had no idea that suicide was a sin ; and she did pray as well as she knew how at the end. . . . I have been trying my hand at plays—"not comic ones" (at least I hope they're not comic—they aren't meant to be).

One critic found it still ambiguous whether, after all, the end of the world was intended by the final scene. The Pope has advised the inhabitants to fly to other villages, and the like, clearly implying that there still was to be a future. . . . What is announced, therefore, argues this critic, is the destruction, not of the world, but of the Church. Hence Socialists, he says, are delighted ; simple folk, puzzled. Others, mistaking quite tragically the whole implication of the book, did actually give up hope. One, not a Catholic, wrote :

Hitherto I have clung as I best knew how to hope in Christianity, but those chapters seem just to have struck heaven out of my sky, and I don't see how to get it back. . . . I have watched the tendency of the suppres-

sion of Christian teaching and dreaded its consequences, but always fled to the hope that the truth would prevail. Only when I found you, a guardian of the faith, forsaking hope, except in a cataclysm, did my frail shield break down.

Others, far more perspicacious, perceived exactly what Benson meant, namely, that the true foe of Supernatural Perfection might be that which looked so akin to it—*natural sufficiency*; the Christian ideal might receive its death-wound, were that possible, in the house of those that should have loved it.

"I have long thought," wrote Father Joseph Rickaby, S.J., "that Antichrist would be no monster, but a most charming, decorous, attractive person, exactly your Felsenburgh."

"This is what the enemy has wanted, something to counteract the sweetness of Christmas, Good Friday, and Corpus Christi, which is the strength of Christianity. The abstruseness of Modernism, the emptiness of Absolutism, the farce of Humanitarianism, the bleakness (so felt by Huxley and Oliver Lodge) of sheer physical science, that is what your Antichrist makes up for. He is, as you make him, the perfection of the Natural, away from and in antithesis to God and His Christ. . . . As Newman says, a man may be near death and yet not die, but still the alarms of his friends are each time justified and are finally fulfilled; so of the approach of Antichrist."

Father Benson appreciated this criticism highly, and had already felt the desire to respond to Father Rickaby's suggestion that he should write a story of "England's evolution *apart* from the Reformation—India, Ireland; the Crown in ecclesiastical politics; Universities." It will be seen how these suggestions were, to some degree, worked out in *The Dawn of All*. There too he obeyed a hint of Sir Mark Sykes, who, after reading the earlier of these two novels, wrote to him:

I think you underestimate the spirituality of the East—even their Pantheists do not accept pure belly-worship

as the end of all things. I have met not a few "Richard Raynals" among the Dervishes on the Anatolian highways, and even on the platforms of railway stations.

Particularly sweet to him, however, was a letter from Lady Gilbert (Rosa Mulholland), and he strove zealously to show his gratitude for her understanding sympathy in *The Dawn of All*. She had written :

I hope you will forgive a stranger for writing to thank you for your great work, *Lord of the World*, and for the place you give to Ireland in the dread days to come.

Mr. Templeton says, "Here we have Ireland altogether." Later, the followers of Antichrist decree that "Ireland must be brought into line."

You have judged us fairly. Ireland, if her population survives, will be in line with the martyrs.

It is a brilliant, beautiful, and terrible book. . . . Again thanking you for the splendid work you are doing for God, and assuring you of the sympathy of Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

But when the sheer bewilderment which the book occasioned to Father Benson's public (too polite, on the whole, to express its feelings loudly) had died down, two main lines of criticism, or, if you will, three, displayed themselves. One, that the book was shockingly sensational. Out of the sails of these critics Benson had already taken the wind by a prefatory note. "I am perfectly aware," he wrote, "that this is a terribly sensational book. . . . But I did not know how else to express the principles I desired (and which I passionately believe to be true) except by producing their lines to a sensational point. I have tried, however, not to scream unduly loud." For all that, it may be truthfully said that the tremulous excitement of the book disguises the sincerity of its message.

<sup>1</sup> Originally, in *The Lord of the World*, the Pope had been made to take refuge and confront Antichrist in *Ireland*.

Next, that the whole story is wildly fantastic, with no construction, no characterisation, and is scientifically impossible. Benson did not care in the least about that. In this book he wanted to display, not characters, but, at most, incarnations of types or ideas ; a thesis requires no other construction than the logical ; a pageant need have no plot. There are two or three ideas in the book, he would have said, and these matter : the characters are but their vehicle, and the scenery is mere scenery. Of course he enjoyed the Jules-Verne mechanisms and the Wellsian "anticipations" ; he got great delight out of his volors, and hoped others would too ; but these were mere products of that spirit of boyish excitement in which he could approach even the most solemn subjects. In consequence of all this his book was far more sanely appreciated in France than in England. There, sensationalism did not matter, and was rather liked. There, too, a thesis was much more quickly detected and followed out by the logical Latin mind, with which, for all its John Bullism, Hugh's own had such definite affinities. Moreover, the elements of the thesis were appreciated by a race which had not lost the Catholic notion, as English people almost entirely have, of the supernatural, and which had had before its eyes a campaign whose aim was frankly anti-supernatural. Few persons in France seriously mistook the intentions of Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes, or failed to recognise that they were assisting at the clash of two essentially disparate ideals of life. English people were still, on the whole, supposing that here was just a conflict of policies, Papal and Republican. Curiously enough, however, it was the laity and the episcopacy which, generally viewed, gave Benson their enthusiastic



approbation ; that is to say, the simple folk unembarrassed by theory, and those who could take a comprehensive view of a national situation. In theological studies grave exception was taken to the sympathetic treatment of Mabel's suicide, but most of all to the suggestion that the Church could be reduced to a numerically negligible quantity. To this Benson gave, at first, no heed ; but later on, in Rome, he took care to explain his intentions and his views, and to steer his book away from the great gulfs which threatened to wash it down, and promised to anchor himself shortly in the orthodox lagoon. This he tried to do by writing *The Dawn of All*, which provoked, however, storms almost more dangerous still, though of a different character.

Perhaps, however, the most significant correspondence the book evoked was between Father Benson and Sir Oliver Lodge, who kindly allows me to use and summarise his letters.

Writing to Mr. A. C. Benson on December 16, 1907, about *The Lord of the World*, he said :

. . . If it had been published anonymously I should have said that an enemy had done this ; and that it was written, with great ability and singular internal knowledge, to bring discredit upon the general outlook of the Roman Church. . . .

The assumption that there can be no religion except a grotesque return to paganism, short of admitting the supremacy of mediaeval Rome, is an unexpected contention to find in a modern book. . . .

I am wondering what the leaders of the Church think of it. Perhaps Pius X may approve ; but it is difficult to suppose that it can meet with general approbation. If it does, it is very instructive.

Father Benson wrote direct to Sir Oliver ; his letter was stuck into the cover of the book, which was then lent

to a friend and never recovered ; it has, then, been lost, but I quote the reply in full :

January 15, 1908.

DEAR FATHER BENSON,—I am greatly indebted to you for taking the trouble to write so fully and frankly explaining your most interesting though surprising position.

I took the book as a parable, however, not as a prophecy, and I find that your attitude is not unlike what I had imagined.

I am doubtful whether to reply further, because it may have the appearance of wishing to *argue* the matter, which is the last thing I should wish. I quite recognise your established position in the Church of Rome ; that is, indeed, what lent so much additional interest to the book. It is the most strongly anti-modernist encyclical I have seen—not excepting the authoritative one that emanated from Rome.

But I do want to urge that Christianity is broader than the papacy, and that the Christian religion may take many forms short of Rome without degenerating into a worship of Humanity—except, indeed, in so far as a religion of the Incarnation is already a worship of a glorified and deified humanity.

I took your book as a sort of expansion of Article XIII of the Church of England, save that it replaces, shall we say, Galilee by Rome, or, at any rate, Paul by Peter. I hope that the antagonism you foreshadow, or already feel, between the active service of humanity on the one hand, and the more passive form of faith—especially the passive adoration of one of the material means of grace—on the other, will not be widely felt ; it will throw things back horribly if it is.

Service of humanity is one thing, and is legitimate—"Inasmuch as ye did it" ; worship of humanity, as typified by the political Antichrist which you depict, is quite another thing, and is a ghastly horror.

That religion must be founded upon dogma—that is, I take it, upon fact—and not only upon sentiment and personal experience, is a very tenable view.

I think it is true ; but then I hope that our knowledge of fact will go on increasing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For I hold that we are free to examine and investigate in a spirit of confident faith, and need submit our reason to nothing less than to the Divine

Guidance, not incorporated in any human being or assembly whatever.

I venture to say this much in order to justify and explain my continuance in the task of advocating human reform and progress in a spirit of Christian religion as taught by Christ, undeterred by the serious and unexpected and most interesting warning conveyed by your book.

Once more I must repeat that this letter is only written with a view to promote mutual understanding so far as possible, and to explain why my practice must remain unreformed; because with the same horror as you feel at mere material prosperity, out of touch with anything spiritual and with no aspiration towards something infinitely higher, I think I see other modes of attaining the desired end and of decanting the old wine into newer bottles.

Sir Oliver Lodge will suspect me, I am sure, of no discourtesy if I indicate (what I suppose is by now clear) that he and Father Benson are not really speaking *to one another* at all. They meet, if you will, in the very distant "unity," that materialism is unsatisfactory. Still, glancing through Sir Oliver's letters, I notice that he and Father Benson do not use the words *paganism*, *modernism*, *papacy*, *humanity*, *faith*, *dogma*, *experience*, *spiritual*, and others, in the same sense; and that many other misunderstandings exist between them.

A biography should not contain a controversy, nor even a positive treatise of theology. For the sake of the many, however, to whom Father Benson's position remained a puzzle, I will try to re-assert his principles briefly, so as to clarify it somewhat.

First, I will say, in passing, that of course all the "grotesquery" of the Humanity-worship, and all the mediaevalism of his Rome, is but a sort of reduction of his principles to their scenic "absurdum." That was part of the joke of the thing; that was the merely sensational

vehicle by which the ideas were brought down, or meant to be brought down, to the popular eye and brain.<sup>1</sup> Paganism, that is, the supreme glorification of the natural man, is, intrinsically, all that is least grotesque; if it tends to the absurd in ritual, that is not because this is pagan, but because it is ritual, a form of expressed emotion which everywhere alike tends to extravagance; that is why the Roman Church so rigidly regulates her austere cultus. Certainly, the Supernatural does not imply mediaevalism. So little has it to do with time and place that it has only secondarily to do with conduct and with creed—with deeds, that is, and thought. Once and for all, Benson's "supernatural" is nothing whatever into which human perfection can be yet further improved *ab intrinseco*. It has nothing to do with sentiment, nor aspiration, nor anything which can be described as merely *quantitatively* better than that which desires, aspires, or endeavours. It is a germ of a qualitatively different life implanted from outside, gentle and nurturing if the human nature, into which it comes, welcomes it and lends itself to its transformations; hostile—even violent—if it be deliberately resisted—deliberately because by inculpable and invincible ignorance a man may resist it without knowing what he does. This, then, is what Benson pictures: humanity consciously refusing the higher *kind* of life which the Church proclaims to it, and insisting on reaching merely that incredibly lofty goal to which its intrinsic efforts can carry it. This rejection of the Supernatural is incarnated in Julian Felsenburgh, who says, "I, in my completed human evolution, am enough." To him Christianity answers, "You are not. Better than you, even if you are successful (though you

<sup>1</sup> In his notes he retains some developments of this, relating to Houses of Joy and the like, and certain details of his ritual of Nature-worship, which he wisely eliminates from his text.

never will be successful), is the humblest Catholic who has in him the superhuman germ." It is the old story: better the ignorant apple-woman, often drunk, always dirty, but "in grace," than the most cultured, moral, elegant, and lofty-souled philosopher, in whom "supernatural grace" (by God's dispensation) is not.

I scarcely need allude to the suggestion that there is a kind of Catholic Broad Church which, regrettably, Benson had not managed to appreciate. It does not exist. No one now takes that old-fashioned phenomenon known as "Modernism" as a conceivable variation of Catholicism. Instructed Catholics do not, because they are instructed, hold their faith more loosely than their simpler brethren. Dogmas assert the same for all; and least of all could Father Benson be imagined at any time of his life preaching his beliefs with his tongue in his cheek, or holding them *cum grano*. There is no such thing as an inner circle of Catholics to which he belonged, or failed to belong; and if he insisted that all human expression, in creed or code, of the Infinite is analogical, he did therein no more than Catholic philosophy insisted he should do; and if his accessibility to the conversation and suggestions of the most wildly heterodox was invariable, that was a part of his infinite courtesy, which in so many issues was misconstrued.

And through it all the grace of humour saved him. "Protestantism seems," he wrote—and by that he meant all rival systems of religious philosophy or creed—"to be built up to a large extent on a lack of the sense of humour. I wonder whether the sense of humour will ever be exalted in the Church to the dignity of a virtue! . . . it saves people from so much foolishness and heresy."

After some considerable time Benson published a kind

of counterblast to *The Lord of the World*. He took some exactly opposite tendencies, and produced their line indefinitely, and stated the results. The book was called *The Dawn of All*, and in it the Catholic Church was seen triumphant.

Monsignor John Masterman, secretary to the Cardinal of Westminster, appears to be suffering from a sudden lapse of memory and to forget everything subsequent to his ordination until the year 1973, when he is forty. He recovers, however, and learns that between 1900 and 1920 an immense revolution had occurred, issuing into a triumph of revealed and authoritative religion, which discovery after discovery now buttressed. Psychology, Comparative Religion, even Physical Science now combined with Social Philosophy and even Art to place the Church on a higher level than any from which she had descended. The world turned Christian—that is, Catholic. *L'Irlande s'encapuchonna*, and became one huge monastery. Berlin alone stood out. It was a sort of "Holy City of Freemasonry." Yet further stunned by this news, administered to him in great detail after dinner by a famous political economist, and amplified by a brother-priest, Monsignor Masterman stood in need of a psychic rest-cure, and it was decided he should travel. This he did mainly by volar, visiting first of all the French King, Louis XXII, at Versailles. There he assisted at a scholastic dispute *de Ecclesia*, held for the benefit of the German Emperor, who was present, and by way of being converted. After Versailles, the Vatican. Over all kings, the Pope. From Rome, the travellers visit Lourdes. A recent journey had given Benson his rather sketchy background for Versailles; Lourdes he paints more accurately. Monsignor Masterman assists at the examination of *miraculés* in the *Bureau*

*de Constatations*, witnesses the four o'clock Procession, sees miracles break out. . . . At Versailles he had learnt "that the Church can reorganise society; in Rome, that she could reconcile nations; . . . in Lourdes, he finds that she could resolve philosophies." The relation of science to religion is at last understood, and miracle makes no difficulty for any man—theoretically, at least. But Dom Adrian Bennett, of Westminster, repudiates a received theological interpretation of certain diseases relating to a particular sort of "cure," which he does not, as it does, class as clearly miraculous. On trial for heresy, or, rather, indocility, Dom Adrian, most devout of men, willingly accepts the supreme penalty, and is executed as a public danger to society. Once more unstrung, and far from consoled by the conversion of the German Emperor with the consequent repression of Socialism in its last refuge, Germany, Monsignor Masterman has to prolong his rest-cure in the Carthusian house at Thurles, and returns after a singular form of retreat to witness and share in the corporate reunion of England to the Holy See and the re-establishment of the Church in that country. A violent Socialist opposition, however, declares itself. In connection with this Monsignor Masterman visits the colony at Boston, where the Socialists are still allowed to find a home. Summoned thence to Rome, he is sent on a papal mission to Berlin, where a revolutionary mob has seized the city and threatens the Emperor's life. The sequel is too complicated to relate. At a critical moment the Pope himself appears, and solves the situation by threatening, in the name of Christianity, a combined valor attack on Berlin and the extinction of the whole Socialist gathering. You must read these singular chapters if you would appreciate this paradox. The Pope, triumphant, visits England, and

just as Monsignor Masterman for the first time in his life fully acknowledges the divine sanction overshadowing the Papal Throne, he emerges from the coma which had beset him, and from the sceptical priest he was before, associated with a rationalist historian, he rises again, in consequence of his long and complicated dream, into the light of faith, and dies.

Each of these books, then, was the product of a mood and the elaboration of a theory. In the first, the mood came before the theory, and was one of those fits of depression of which we have heard the echoes in his letters. And, it seems to me, it is this mood which is important. The theory may have its interest : Mr. Chesterton, however, in his *Napoleon of Notting Hill*, has sufficiently ridiculed the plan of taking one force from among the many of which the world's progress is the resultant, and tracing its consequences as if nothing else existed to neutralise or deflect it. One is often asked, "What would happen if *everyone* became monks and nuns?" The sufficient answer is, "They won't." Hence, *The Lord of the World* appears clever theorising perhaps, but idle. Things won't happen, like that. Not idle, however, is it as the largely unconscious revelation of the dreadful loneliness, spiritual as well as mental, in which its author felt himself sequestered—too often, one would say. Percy Franklin created that loneliness deliberately, we saw ; but in it he felt himself, all the more terribly, one isolated man on whom the weight of the world lay crushingly. Mr. A. C. Benson has alluded to the fact of that load of realised sacerdotal responsibility which crushed upon his brother. We could have guessed it from this book, had we no other evidence. It is, then, sufficient to say that there were hours, in this variegated Cambridge life, when Benson felt converging on his soul



the enormous array of forces hostile to that Catholicism in which he so passionately believed. Cambridge in a true sense incarnated them, even as in himself was incarnated, he felt, the opposing force of Catholic Christianity. His shoulders were not strong enough: he was a man of stammering lips; a child. Who was sufficient for these things? Yet he had said, "Here am I; send me." God had sent him, like Aaron, like Jeremiah, like the Baptist. How, then, did this drive his soul inward on to God! How must faith and hope have been purified within him, and how must prayer have been refined into a white flame of selfless aspiration! How must he have emerged from his Gethsemanes readier and readier for the Calvary! In defiance almost of decency, I would insist on that. I have known many who have declared that these years at Cambridge were for him just a whirl of many businesses and of selfishly sought excitement. No; he had, within himself, the secret struggles which appear, half unveiled, in his romance, and worse. This, I believe, is what almost alone lends that book a value; but it is a great one indeed, if it should help us to revise, it may be, our estimate of what, during these years, was proceeding in its author's soul.

As for *The Dawn of All*, its theory, I think, appealed even less to the public than did that of the earlier book, if only because it seemed almost cynical that a man should so light-heartedly preach a sermon first on one text and then on its exact opposite, couching his doctrine in the shape of a prophecy uttered with an equal glow of seeming conviction. However, criticisms centred most strongly on the condemnation of Dom Adrian; but after carefully reading the many letters Father Benson received and wrote on the point, I find in them no more than a restatement

of the abstract doctrine that a Church, universally recognised as speaking with a divine voice, may appeal for secular help in enforcing her legitimate decrees when the disregarding of these threatens the structure of society. Whether this doctrine could be applied in the case of Dom Adrian is a doubtful point, but less important than the fact that Benson wrote often and emphatically that he did not for a moment expect the pictured solution to realise itself, and that he even hoped it would not. Neither Science, nor the State, nor Religion would ever, he was convinced, find themselves in such mutual relations as he had invented to make the heresy trial possible. Hence, all the more did he appear to be wasting his powder in the air. As for the mood in which the book was written, it was that in which he wrote, too, to his mother of a famous education meeting, I think, at the Albert Hall :

There was the biggest meeting that ever was at the Albert Hall, I believe, on Saturday. 100,000 applications for tickets. An open-air overflow of 10,000, and the Hall crammed with people bawling, "Faith of our Fathers!" Fifty members of Parliament! Oh! really, really, there won't be anything left but us soon. We are first chop.

But this, too, was transitory.

Father Benson began some time in 1905 to write the chapters which appeared afterwards in book-form under the title *Papers of a Pariah*.<sup>1</sup> These have been so eclipsed

<sup>1</sup> They appeared first of all in the *Month*, with the exception of those on "Persecution" and "The Dance as a Religious Exercise," which were considered unsuitable for that magazine. The criticisms passed upon their manuscript were mainly theological or philosophical. It was feared that the human will was made positively creative of reality; and, again, that the Trinity was considered to be explicable by reason. Father Benson, who recognised his unfamiliarity with certain branches of theological expression, always accepted this sort of suggestion without a murmur, and once, after a remark of Monsignor Scott's, cried out (Mr. Shane Leslie tells us) that he would never preach a theological sermon again.

by the four sensational novels of this period that I fear they suffer from a very ill-deserved neglect. Apart from their somewhat Chestertonian cleverness, they contain a great deal of very beautiful writing, a point of view rarely assumed in Catholic literature, and a very direct expression of mysticism, which shows us with greater certainty than can the much dramatised personages of the novels what was passing in Father Benson's own soul about this time.

At first sight this would not appear to be so. In November he wrote to Mr. Rolfe :

The article on a Requiem is the nucleus of a new book—consisting of essays, written by a Non-Catholic actor, describing emotions. I am enjoying it immensely. . . . It offers a wide liberty to an ordained priest. I, R. H. B., merely edit the work, priggishly hesitating as to whether I am justified in including this or that paper. Doesn't that promise a very pleasurable set of poses?

The book, however, was made up of poses much less than might, from this, have been expected.

The first chapter, for instance, "At a Requiem," is the direct transcript of an experience of which Mr. Shane Leslie preserves the memory. Benson, after the Requiem Mass at which one morning he assisted, was so impressed that he could not "say anything except, 'Black and yellow,—black and yellow,'" and retired forthwith to his room, and wrote that fine paper. In it, some distance on, he cries :

I despair of making clear, to those who cannot see it for themselves, the indescribably terrible combination of the colours of yellow and black, the deathliness of the contrast between flames and the unbleached wax from which they rise. . . .

If further proof were needed of the extraordinarily direct way in which Benson saw what he saw—I mean, his refusal to allow conventional judgments as to what he

ought to see, ought to confess to seeing, or ought to think of what he saw, to confuse his clear perception of what he as a matter of fact did see—these *Papers* would supply it. Herein is much of that Chestertonian quality for which they are noticeable. Mr. G. K. Chesterton is never tired of telling us that we do not see what we look at—the one undiscovered planet is our Earth. All the beginning of his *Napoleon* plays with that theme; all his *Defendant* is based on his recognition of unobserved qualities which stare one in the face. And Benson read much of Mr. Chesterton, and liked him in a qualified way.

“Have you read,” he asks in this year, “a book by G. K. Chesterton called *Heretics*? If not, do see what you think of it. It seems to me that the spirit underneath it is splendid. He is not a Catholic, but he has the spirit. He is so joyful and confident and sensible! One gets rather annoyed by his extreme love of paradox; but there is a sort of alertness in his religion and in his whole point of view that is simply exhilarating. I have not been so much moved for a long time. . . . He is a real mystic of an odd kind.”

Hugh Benson began, then, by seeing the outside of things—in this series of papers, nearly always of *ritual*—with an alert and unaccustomed eye, and then put what he saw straight down on to paper without the slightest fear of shocking susceptibilities, even as he was enormously devoid of that sterilising wish to “edify” which issues, he felt, into cant, jargon, and all conventionality. It is, largely, in this same power of sharply observing coloured, moving things that consists the beginning of that disconcerting affinity, which (perhaps disproportionately) strikes me between this book and parts of Wilde’s *De Profundis*. Benson had, and Wilde was resolving, so he thought, to get, that direct eye for colour, line, and texture that the Greeks possessed. They did not waste time considering

"whether shadows were mauve," but said that the sea was wine-coloured, and left you marvelling (when at last you noticed it) at the inexplicable correctness of the epithet. Benson, in his relentless observation and re-statement of ordinary services like Benediction and Low Mass, is very much himself; when he passes to describe High Mass as a dance, he is, for observation and paradoxical mysticism, at his most Chestertonian; in his direct extraction of natural emotion from simple and beautiful elements, like fire and wax, as in his description of the Easter ceremonies, he reaches, sometimes, an almost word-for-word identity with Wilde. Benson passed through life, therefore, seeing what he looked at, and was intoxicated with delight in what ordinary men found banal. Better still, he rapidly found unlooked-for analogies between what he saw of the elements of other departments in life, and this power had already shown itself in childhood by his gift of sudden and happy simile. Now it is characteristic of genius, said Aristotle, that it sees *connections*. Best of all, certain transcendent generalisations could, with great ease, apparently, disengage themselves from these same data, and reveal in his personal life that mystical consciousness which, in *Richard Raynal*, had already displayed itself as so exquisite, fragrant, and tragic too.

Perhaps, in the *Papers of a Pariah*, one of the more potent of these general "directive notions," or unifying visions, is that of the Church, as a Mighty Mother, as Newman made Charles Reding see her, long ago at Oxford. A sort of Demeter, with all the knowledge and sorrow of earth in her heavenly eyes, she guides the soul through all possible paths of human emotion, and teaches it, in them, one identical lesson of the diviner love. In the very first

chapter this vision is paramount. Nothing is more human than this Church, "eternally young and undying"; her eyes are "terrified"; she "struggles piteously" against her own stern creed. In Holy Week, she turns, a "great Mother of us all, smiling and weeping," to her half panic-stricken child, asking it what it thinks, now, of the Jesus whom her sanctioned audacity has caused to traverse, as it were, the human stage, re-enacting His supreme tragedy. It might have been enough to listen to her own voice, crying aloud now in this language and now that, for—

as in delirium a man talks in a long-forgotten tongue, now, when his heart is rent, the Catholic Church drops twenty centuries without an effort, and speaks as she spoke underground in Rome, and in Paul's hired house, and in Crete and Alexandria,

and she replaces her barbaric Latin by a "roar of Greek"—it might even have been enough that she should cause her chorus of "saints and sages of all time" to crowd beneath the stage,

chanting comment and interpretation, running now on to the higher platform, now abased in the dust twisting like worms, now turning to cry to me, gesticulating what I was too dull to understand,

or even to have set upon the stage her motley mob of actors—"clever, shallow souls, lovers, foes, simple, passionate, stupid, fiery-eyed, self-seeking, imperceptive"—but she must needs put God there Himself.

In the midst God has been walking, dumb, with gestures, lifting His hands in useless explanation, in appeal, in agony, dropping them in despair . . . till the Son of Man . . . Jesus turned His great eyes upon us out of His drawn, sunken Face, lit only by a single flame. . . . Jesus stared at us, streaked with blood, expressionless, blank and white-faced, rigid and all but dead. . . .

In the chapter called *The Personality of the Church* this

perception reaches its most intellectualised form, I suppose ; and I need not say that in this attempt to express the *identification* of the Christian soul, through the Church, with Christ, Father Benson is touching upon the most sublime treatise in all theology—if indeed one treatise can thus be separated from another, where all are concatenated—the root-mystery, anyhow, of the Christian faith, which declares that that soul which is supernaturalised by “grace,” has become incorporate with Christ, and has the Spirit of God Himself for Indweller.

All these topics of ritual and of mystic interpretation ought to be more fully discussed in the chapters which deal directly with art and mysticism. Here I want no more than to emphasize that in these slight “papers,” overlooked by Father Benson himself, appears to be contained a very explicit and intense expression of all the elements of his richly endowed soul. His verbal cleverness is at its most vivid ; his artistic perception is never more acute ; his supernatural intuition soars as high as ever it will, or can.

And this is in those years which by so many seem to be judged, and indeed are, immature ; but are certainly not frivolous, selfish, or charlatan.

In the winter of 1904-5 Benson met with a book already alluded to called *Hadrian VII*, and very soon found himself involved in an acquaintanceship of an absorbing and peculiar sort. So completely is his life for the next two or three years coloured by and interconnected with Frederick Rolfe’s that it would be impossible to minimise this episode.

Mr. Rolfe had written, as early as 1895-6, some stories in the *Yellow Book* of an almost wholly fascinating sort. They, with others, reappeared later in book form, en-

titled, *Stories Toto told Me*, and again in 1901, once more added to and slightly altered, under the title, *In His Own Image*. Mr. Rolfe was then writing under the pseudonym *Frederick Baron Corvo*. Most of these stories were offered as spoken by a young Italian peasant, and have given endless delight to many beside Hugh Benson. He, for his part, used to read them aloud to his guests at Hare Street, and in Rome itself, with infinite gusto, not always discriminating, as exactly as might have been desired, the pious sensitivities of his audience. These were often scandalised. For together with a most fantastic humour, an exquisite appreciation of the loveliness of nature, and (it was by many diagnosed) a profound, most philosophical, and even tender piety, went, in these stories, a vein of light, audacious mockery, or at least of persiflage. Benson, and those who by temperament loved the book, would write this mockery down to the childlike familiarity of the South Italian faith, ready to tease, to cozen, and cajole, to chaff, even, the most august denizens of the Divine Palace. To others, English even in religion, it would be irreverent and an unpardonable offence. Benson used the book as a test and touchstone for the quality of a man's religion. But others, reading, would see—and perhaps find it hard to forgive themselves for seeing—hints of far darker faults than simple flippancy; and of these, a certain deep bitterness of grudge would yet not be the darkest.

*Hadrian VII*, which appeared in 1904, contained the account of an Englishman's accession to the Papal Throne, and of his quite unconventional behaviour in his unique position. The book created a sensation in the press and in the very restricted circles of its readers, who were mainly clerical. These facts are due, in the first case, to



its quite bewilderingly novel style and diction, and in the other to its vitriolic caricature of many well-known Catholic ecclesiastics, and its vehement criticism of established usage and policy. Over much of it played the light of a quite uncanny beauty; its crackle of epigram was continual; an under-current of white-hot personal passion was at all times discernible. For those who were not repelled by its odd language, its narrow topic, its densely cryptic allusions, and its departmental detail, it could become, I imagine, quite fascinating. Benson, who read into it what was so spontaneous in himself, a keen appreciation of true spirituality exactly commensurable with a flashing perception of its carnal limitations, was entirely carried away by it.

"My dear Sir," he wrote in February to its author, "I hope you will allow a priest to tell you how grateful he is for *Hadrian the Seventh*. It is quite impossible to say how much pleasure it has given me in a hundred ways, nor how very deeply I have been touched by it. I have read it three times, and each time the impression has grown stronger of the deep loyal faith of it, its essential cleanness, and its brilliance."

He implores him to bring out another book soon. "Only I do entreat you to put the bitterness out of sight." And he offers himself for any service for which he may be competent.

He reads and re-reads *Hadrian*, and in May, 1905, declares:

I propose to put *Hadrian VII* among the three books from which I never wish to be separated.

It is true that he also proposed to paste together certain pages upon Socialists as too wholly "sordid." "Do not paste down these pages," Mr. Rolfe retorts; ". . . for the

completely sordid Socialists will still exist under your paste, and paste is a notable nursery for microbes."

Benson obeys: *Hadrian* shall be taken unbowdlerised.

In October he will say: "I am slowly tasting *Hadrian* again, with renewed joy. My dear man !!!"<sup>1</sup>

This letter initiated a correspondence somewhat labour-edly humorous at first, but afterwards terribly stripped of affectations, especially on Benson's harassed side. For his part, he behaved with inconceivable generosity, even financial; he toiled unceasingly to find publishers for the MSS. which Mr. Rolfe had ready; the correspondence itself became a severe tax, involving, very soon, letters not only weekly, but at times daily, and of an intimate character, exhaustingly charged with emotion.

By 7th March Benson had volunteered the information that he was "perpetually quarrelling with his best friends," and Mr. Rolfe could answer:

The reason you quarrel with your best friends is quite simple. So is mine. I'm a crab, and you're a scorpion. Nature armed us both. Of course I can't say what use you have made of your stars. No one can but you. But you started with determination, reticence, tenacity, suspiciousness, the wisdom of the serpent, self-control, brusqueness, fierce desire, dynamic energy, tremendous potency. If I had to judge your vocation, I should not have given you priesthood, but medicine, chemistry (concerning oil), or the stage, as a sphere for your nerve and pluck. You know that you can relieve many physical ills by touch.

Henceforward this correspondence turns often on astrology, and Benson with intense interest had a horoscope drawn by Rolfe.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I notice, by comparing dates, that he was just beginning work upon *The Waster*, i.e. *The Sentimentalists*. One could have guessed, at least, that his mind was with Chris Dell.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the horoscope printed on p. 462.

With many resentments, reconciliations, explanations, and confidences, the friendship rushed along, both sides handing themselves over, superficially speaking, with the greatest rapidity, Benson doing so most, and denying that he was doing so at all. He harboured Rolfe's manuscripts, criticised them minutely, and consulted him from the outset about *Richard Raynal*.

With Rolfe he proposes to go a walking tour in August, equipped "with a shirt or so, a tooth-brush, and a breviary"; they are to enter no large towns, yet, somehow, to find "a mass-house" wherever they might spend the night. There was to be much sitting under hedges, and sleeping in small inns. He is haunted by the charm of his lonely week two years ago, in lay clothes, with a bicycle; "one meets charming people in inns," and he relates his encounter with a possible Forbes Robertson all over again.

Rolfe also suggested that novel, which so many longed to see written by Benson, and of which he has given, so to say, a page or two in *Come Rack, Come Rope*; it was to deal with "Venerable Mary of Scotland."

The walking tour took place, despite endless expressions of nervousness lest they should disappoint one another, and with resolutions to efface all preconceived ideas, and it ended in better than amity—a notable experiment. They returned by way of Tremans.

Rather later on, the friends started a scheme for collaborating in a historical romance, or, if you will, a biography, in romantic form, of St. Thomas of Canterbury. Benson was to do most, though not all, of the actual writing; Rolfe was to work up the stage setting and the properties, and he did in fact collect a good deal of information, and draw some sketches. His name was to appear beside Benson's on cover and title-page, and he was to

receive a third of the profits. I have been so emphatically asked to display, as far as possible, Benson's method of composition, and this is so clearly discernible from the history of this episode, which also reveals so much that is of intrinsic interest, that I may be allowed to spend some time upon the history of a book which, when it actually appeared, seemed small to insignificance.

On May 10, 1906, Fr. Benson wrote to Mr. Rolfe :

I propose that the story be told by the monk, in the same kind of way that Don Tarquinio and Richard Raynal do it, a purported translation from old French. 2. That no female interest enters it, except in the Platonic love of the said monk for a female child of the age of ten years, whom he thinks to be like our Lady, but who turns out entirely soulless(?). 3. . . . That the book is written at the command of the King, in the old age of the monk, resembling the other biographies. 4. . . . That the monk has strong and vivid artistic perception, and is occupied by his community in some branch of handicraft, *e.g.* chasing silver (Benvenuto Cellini). 5. . . . That we get the vignette scheme by giving extracts only from his book, with caustic comments of our own—not many footnotes—but a good deal of chronicle in our own words. This will enable us to concentrate all our attention upon descriptive word-painting, and to serve up mystical reflections as we should wish to see them done. We can write the historical interludes in a sharp breezy way, which will be an agreeable relief from his musings. 6. My theory in all this is that the artistic object is shown up through the coloured lights of various personalities. In this way we shall get at least three, the monk's, yours, and mine. 7. As to the scheme of the book, I suggest three parts.

#### I.

Begin with the departure of our man (Gervase ?) at the age of fifteen years to be page to the Lord Chancellor. (Fortunately Thomas was very intimate with his servants ; *cf.* Herbert of Bosham.) Almost at once Thomas becomes Archbishop, and the part ends with his consecration in 1162.

## II.

Begin by description of St. Thomas's life. Gervase becomes novice at Christ Church Convent; attached to Thomas; goes with him to Northampton; row; flight of Thomas; Gervase says good-bye to him at Sandwich in 1164.

## III.

Six years have elapsed. Last Christmas. Arrival of Thomas. Martyrdom. First miracles. Please send comments some time *soon*, as I am beginning to warm up about it. Please also remember that my method, when once begun, is to work like lightning, and then to take a rest. I can't plod *at all*. I shall start to read hard presently.

All sorts of difficulties immediately sprang up. It appeared impossible for the two collaborators to co-ordinate their leisures. Relations between them were very strained from causes quite independent of literary incompatibility, and the months went by. On February 11, 1907, Benson wrote during a tragic interspace:

St. Thomas is simply unthinkable for me at present—after Easter let me consider him again. But your suggestion is the right one, I am sure; and I cannot conceive why we should not do it sometime this year. You once said to me that Plot was your weak point. I think there is truth in that. What you can do (Good Lord, how you can!) is to build up a situation when you've got it; but you can't move along. You are a vignette-, a portrait-, not a landscape-painter, a maker of chords, not of progressions. Hence only people who can go on looking at one point of view can appreciate you; the B. P. wants a story, or it doesn't take interest. . . . Forgive this—it has just come explicitly to me. Therefore again I am strongly inclined to collaboration; and have set St. Thomas full at the back of my mind—I think I may be able to make a plot sometime in the summer.

*April 16.*

The Becket book. My dear man, I would have done it if it had been possible; but I simply couldn't—one must follow one's currents. But I too wish it had been possible.

July 18.

What about having a shot at Becket as soon as I am established here for the autumn? If you say yes, I will try to finish up my other job before I go away. If we worked hard we might get him out next spring. If you think Yes—(1) please begin to think on paper as disconnectedly as you like. (2) Begin in a small note-book, which can be bandied to and fro, to inscribe vignettes, phrases, *technical* facts, customs. I have been digesting; as is my wont. And what appears evident is that we must have a young man who adores Thomas the Chancellor; becomes his page, develops a vocation, and, while on the point of leaving Thomas, whom he loves, in obedience to it, suddenly hears that Thomas is to be made archbishop. Thomas concealed it from him in order not to bias him. He also separates from his young woman. [Look here, we can make these monks real people and silence the gainsayers.] He is with him at the end, he views a miracle or two, and is left transfigured in glory. Oh! a book!

*But*, I don't know the period yet. Remember that.

August 6.

Thomas is taking shape and vigour in an astounding manner. I think I see it all from start to finish. It can be a gorgeous Book.

Now I think that the hero must write it himself, as an old monk, in 1205, at the age of sixty, and that it must be of the nature of *Richard Raynal*, which, by the way, is the best thing I have ever written. In terms of You, it must be like "Don Tarquinio." He must be a holy, humorous old man. I have tried to see the book in so many other forms, but after a troubled night last night I woke suddenly at 6 A.M., and there lay the whole book vivid and convincing. There are three passions in his life. The first is the love of a girl; the second is the love of Thomas; the third is the love of God—and these three are transformed into a chord of extraordinary beauty at the end. I enclose a scheme of chapters to explain this. Please invoke Thomas many times over it before you say Yes or No.

Next as to the method of writing. This is exceedingly difficult. But what I think is that, as you say, your talent is in scalloping and embroidering. But there are some chapters that must consist simply of exquisite lacework—

these I want you to do. Further in my chapters—if you agree to this division of labour—I want you to supply me with innumerable facts, as well as to write completely certain portions of those chapters. We shall see better when we make a proper start, how these parts shall be assigned.

Next, as soon as I can I will write the first chapter and send it to you. But for this, I want as soon as you can let me have it, a small map of the castle you speak of, with a careful vignette sketch in words of the view from its front outside the Hall. I also want a description of a young man's dress, an old man's dress, and a girl's dress, with any vivid bits to be worked in. You will understand why when you see the scheme for chap. v.<sup>1</sup>

Next,<sup>1</sup> please get hold of Father Morris's *Life of St. Thomas Becket*, the latest edition. I have just read it through carefully for the third time.

For other things to go on with, would you begin to study up Canterbury—Christchurch—monastic customs peculiar to that place; and begin to draw out little maps of the buildings; of the road to Sandwich, of the disposition of the city; and find out anything you can of the Chancellor's court—where it was—its customs, &c. Anything about Northampton, too, will be useful. Now please consider all this.

For the style of the book, we must be very Saxon and Norman—it must be pure and limpid and alliterative. I purpose to say at the beginning that the Latin was found in the same place as that of *Richard Raynal*, and that we have rendered it as well as we could into English. When we get into difficulties we can have lacunæ in the MS., but not many.

I believe the book can be Absolutely Exquisite—and yet as vivid and hot as you like.

September 17.

The University Library is closed, blow it. I have been poking about to-day for the Rolls Series of *St. Thomas's Lives*. . . . The library opens in a week, and then I will set to work hard.

[Undated but after September 30.]

Now, then, I have made a beginning. I read it aloud to Father X., who laughed and shook with joy. Tell me what you think. I think it's far from bad. If you approve, please to write chap. ii.; and send me as quickly as may

<sup>1</sup> All this Rolfe sent to Benson.

be a *copy of the contents* which I sent to you. Mine is not quite the same as yours.

Please note the similes—as large as a lion,  
as proud as a queen,  
as little as a kitten,

(b) the alliterations and consonances,

(c) the clear resonance of rhythm. Please don't use odd words. Oh, we can make it a lovely Book!<sup>1</sup>

I have read this day Gervase's account of St. T. up to his flight from Northampton, and have abstracted it all.

I am all on fire, and must go on hard now. Please annotate freely, writing as a rule on the back of the preceding page, with marks like ☉ + \* +, so that when the pages are opened, as a book, both text and comment are visible simultaneously.

Your chapter, I think, describes his ride to London.

Please make his love grow steadily till he is all engaged with it, and sentimental too. He swears he will be no monk.

Our monks and nuns are not going to be "Piminy"; they are going to be fierce, like cats.

Make Robert, please, visit Patrizzio (?) and "see his Maker" there—if possible, in the hands of a hermit—on his way to London. Let him, if you wish, have a scuffle with the rebels, and then bring him to the point, where the chapter leaves him. If you can't get all this in, make two chapters. Eh?

Please indicate by postcard, by return, the exact moment at which you will leave Robert at the end of your bit, so that I can go on, provisionally, at once, while the fire burns.

[Undated, before October 10.]

(Please make the boys playing football outside the city walls as Robert comes in. They did this, and their fathers went to see them.)

Here are a couple more. I found I had to divide III into two. Of course they will need dovetailing with yours.

<sup>1</sup> As an example of what the book was to have been like, I quote from a letter written to his mother on October 2 [1907]:

"I have begun Becket. Oh, such a gorgeous chapter!—beginning like the Acts of the Apostles with a long sentence full of alliteration. 'By reason and by right it is that I, once Robert the worldling, now Robert the monk, who accompanied with him . . . and may God prosper my pen and Thomas approve!' Rich."



Now, can you do the next? And I will proceed with V, which I think will be two.

And would you be prepared to do Thomas' Consecration? This needs *extraordinary* accuracy as to procedure at *that date*. If you can just do a piece of description of it, seen by Robert, with references to his emotions at that time, I will add collars and cuffs, and fit it on to VII.

. . . With regard to IV, I will take it that Robert has his interview with Thomas in your chapter, and I will begin with, "All, then, that my lord said to me quieted me a little. . . ."

Now, all this is my only way of working—*i.e.* like lighting while the obsession is on me. Don't be afraid that I shall hurry you too much when once we have made a first draught [*sic*]. But I must hack at the wood very fast till I have shaped the figure. . . .

Did you know that the twisted candle on a rod, on Easter Eve=a spear with a serpent? I didn't. Isn't it heavenly?

Did St. T., as Chancellor, live at Westminster? I CANNOT find out.

P.S.—Tell me if you want my notes. If so, I will send them either before or after Morris.

[Undated, but before October 10.]

Hope to send you soon an exhaustive map and details of Christ Church, Canterbury. I have borrowed a quantity of books on the subject. . . . Please make a copy of this. . . . *Please return it at once*. Please send me your chapter as soon as ever you can, or at least an analysis of it. I am tingling to go on.

I am consulting people and books furiously [he adds a list]. Lord! Such a book as it will be!

I know *all* about the monastery now. It is an obsession, I think.

Mr. Rolfe sent his chapter, which Benson found vivid and interesting, but too long. He returned it "with suggestions."

October 10.

As soon as you can, please. I cannot go on without my MSS., or yours! And I am bursting.

N.B.—(1) Benedict must come out of the chapters I

have just sent. Alexander Cuellin, the Welshman, afterwards the cross-bearer, must fetch C., instead, to speak for him. (Benedict doesn't come on the scene till Canterbury.)

(2) Herbert of Bosham, a tall, proud, swaggering man, must be in the little parlour with W. Fitzstephen; also Ernulph, T.'s secretary.

(3) The Prior of Canterbury (Wibert) and John of Salisbury must be dining in hall that night.

Now, *please* hurry up. Polish afterwards. Just let it run, now, full tilt; otherwise there will be no go in it.

October 11.

Oh, be explicit! . . . I haven't an idea whether it is "what people want," but I don't see how else the book can be done. Tell me how else. But tell me quick.

What I believe can be done—only it will be incredibly difficult—is the writing of such clean, sonorous, vivid English, with the inclusion of mysticism, humour, and deeds of blood, that the B. P. will swallow the whole, and like both taste and substance. I don't think that it will sell frantically, but I think it will sell decently. But I don't in the least pledge myself to it. If you have an alternative method, tell me what it is. *Have you read "Richard Raynal"?* Well, then.

Next, I don't want to hack the whole thing out alone. Please do that first chapter, at any rate, *at once*, and let's see. I am sure you must do chapters here and there throughout, as I have suggested. But for the Lord's sake make haste! Remember that I am incapable of long-sustained fire. If we dawdle at all now, it will be five years before the book will be out.

I hope to goodness you have taken my plan and my notes in. I did want you to copy it, so that it would be familiar to you; I cannot send it backwards and forwards. I am always wanting it. Look here, I send it again, in despair. PLEASE COPY MAIN DETAILS, AND RETURN INSTANTLY.

October 16.

Please send me back my chapters with comments, and get on with the Consecration. . . . Don't let's have "quoth." It seems to me we must (1) not be archaic, but seem to be, (2) conceal the fact that we seem to be, and are not.

[Undated.]

I haven't done a word since I last wrote. I tell you all my enthusiasm is evaporating. I shall soon be immersed in other things, unless something comes from you. You know, I can't write except at full pressure. I cannot dribble. Just off to town. Nearly mad!

During his visit to town he was assured that he would make far greater profits if Mr. Rolfe consented to his name *not* appearing. He asked him to consent to disappearing from the title-page, though still receiving one third of the profits. He added:

I say, you mustn't bring in Henry for ages yet. He wasn't in England at all at this time. The announcement wasn't made like that. T. knew before anyone else. Your MS. has thrown me into a flutter. The Henry atmosphere must slowly darken through the book before he appears. Please consult the scheme again. You will see then.

Mr. Rolfe objected to the elimination of his name. Benson suggested his own name alone on the cover and title-page, and a generous acknowledgment, in a note, of Mr. Rolfe's assistance. Benson was very upset by a further refusal. He offered to make Mr. Rolfe a present of all, absolutely, that he himself had hitherto written and discovered, with full leave to publish it as his own. He foresaw that Rolfe would refuse this, and therefore was prepared to submit to the terms of the original informal agreement made under a misapprehension.

"When we both scoop more money," he wrote on November 20 to Mr. Rolfe, who now agreed, "and therefore more future liberty, by the suppression of your name on the back of a book, it appears to me simply headlong to spoil it. [But] I tell you I'm simply mad for want of time. That was why I was in such a hurry a month or two ago. I had time then. I haven't now; and God knows when I shall have it again."

A quarrel, however, which on entirely different grounds had been raging furiously between the two men—it is idle to pretend that any relations between Father Benson and Mr. Rolfe could ever be merely “strained”—spread finally to the affairs of collaboration. In January Rolfe issued an ultimatum accusing Benson of driving a coach and six through the spirit of the original understanding and over the dead body of its letter. It were useless to quote the correspondence bearing on this subject, which issued, as far as St. Thomas was concerned, in the presentation by Benson of a completed MS. to a series in which for some time he had taken a keen interest.

As early as August 8, 1907, Father Benson had been approached by a Catholic publisher in connection with a projected series of “lives” of great Catholic “heroes of faith and action.” The books were to be low in price, illustrated by the best artists, and of literary value, as well as edifying. Father Benson suggested Dom Bede Camm, O.S.B., as general editor, and from a letter he wrote to him on behalf of the scheme I quote the following paragraphs :

*August 11 [1907].*

As regards the contributors, I should suggest :

M. Mary Loyola (York),

Miss — (whom I believe I have discovered),

Mr. Martindale, S.J. [if he only would],

Father Tabb (for poetry),

Francis Thompson (for poetry),

Mrs. Meynell (for poetry),

Nora Chesson [did you see S. Cyriac in the *Dublin* ?  
Lovely !],

F. Rolfe [if you don't mind],

and loads and heaps more . . . Gabriel Pippet (for illustrations).

I should be charmed to contribute one or two myself (chapters)—if you wish it. . . .

It will be seen that Benson is, on the one hand, still anxious to find an outlet for the talent of his friend, and, again, does not hesitate to remodel with his usual forcefulness a plan initiated by another. In this case the response was very favourable. Almost immediately after Mr. Rolfe's ultimatum, Benson wrote on February 6 from Cambridge :

MY DEAR DOM BEDE,—Here is *St. Thomas*. How I have toiled at him ! And how dissatisfied I am !

I am not sure about the length ; . . . I can add any amount more in proof if it is wanted.

[He then discusses minutiae.]

I have found it very hard [he continues] not to follow slavishly after Father Morris. His *Life* is so admirably arranged and selected. However, I have studied the contemporary *Lives* with care, and done my best. But strictly accurate biography is not my strong point. I can't let myself go absolutely.

I have abstracted the Exile part a great deal. To give a full account of all the debates and arguments and movements would be dreary reading for the young person. So I have tried rather to sketch the confusion confusedly.

He encloses drawings for the clothes to be worn in the pictures, based (it seems to me) wholly upon Mr. Rolfe's contributions, and concludes on February 15 :

I hope you like the book tolerably. It was an awful job. . . . I must write a short note at beginning, acknowledging authorities, &c.

I am nearly mad with sleeplessness now ! Awful ! Apparently I can do with  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours— $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours per 24 ! At least, so Providence seems to think !

*St. Thomas* appeared in 1908, and is a charming and little read volume, with an edifying preface upon the relations of Church and State, and contains no allusion to Mr. Rolfe, and offers itself as straightforward history of a popular type.

It is, too, while he is at the Cambridge Rectory that we find the first allusion to his book, *The Confessions of a Convert*.

I wonder whether you have ever heard of a paper (American) called the *Ave Maria*. I am writing my autobiography in it, in about eight chapters, calling it "Confessions of a Convert." If you come across it, it might interest you. It gives a careful and agreeable account of Mirfield, though, as Mrs. Jones says, "naming no names," except Gore's.

The book was received, naturally, with mingled applause and rebuke. In America it was felt that Benson should have revealed much more of his inner life. To have done so, he retorted, would have been sheer indecency. It was not his emotions he wanted to advertise, but his intellectual path, which he wished so to trace as to help others' feet, perchance, to walk in it. It led him into one regrettable misunderstanding, which need not be discussed, with Father Frere, who was, on the one hand, anxious lest the reputation of Mirfield should suffer, and, on the other, indignant that the magazine with whom his quarrel really was should have perverted Benson's generous and kindly consideration, which he displayed in his description of that place, into a "weapon." Both sides behaved, after the preliminary ruffle, with that affectionate forbearance which might have been expected.

"I wonder," he writes to Mr. Molesworth, "whether you would approve of my *Confessions of a Convert*, just out. There are bits in it about ourselves in the Holy Land. I am getting a warm time from Anglican newspapers, and, HONESTLY, I don't know why. I had thought it really innocuous and friendly and appreciative. I don't bother to answer. Usually such papers as the *Church Times* simply refuse to insert one's defence. *Dicunt! Quid dicunt? Dicant!* I'm supposed to be terribly degenerate since my secession; and people shake their heads sadly.

"What a funny world it is! . . . Oscar Wilde says somewhere that we are like children eating ices out of one dish, and pausing to beat one another over the head with the spoons."

Father Alexander, O.F.M., kindly writes to me that the *Confessions* was one of the favourite books of the late Canon Sheehan, author of *My New Curate* and many other novels. "It is a thoroughly sincere book," the Canon would exclaim.<sup>1</sup>

His printed controversies were, indeed, remarkably few. In them he was courteous in form, but his thrusts were sharp. Father Wynne, S.J., could not allow him to publish in the *Fordham University Messenger* a reply he prepared to Miss Stone's scholarly criticism of *The Queen's Tragedy*. The *Contemporary Review*, too, refused a retort of his to a criticism on *The King's Achievement*.

And, after a savage attack, he merely mentioned, in a private letter, that he was

glad to know that L—— was the reviewer of my book. That man reminds me of a stage army; he runs across continually in new uniforms every time. He writes a leading article every week.

But since Benson himself let these affairs drop quickly, I cannot see that anything would be gained by dwelling on them here. Enough to have mentioned that they did occur, for the sake of adding one slight, but truthful shadow to the picture of a career seemingly all successes.

<sup>1</sup> This was in the August of 1913, when Father Alexander was staying with him at Doneraile. Father Alexander immediately had forwarded to him a copy of *The Friendship of Christ*, which he had not seen, and the Canon wrote, "For the next few weeks it will be my *Vade Mecum*, and I shall keep it to refer to from time to time." Not four weeks elapsed between Canon Sheehan's receipt of this book and his death. It may safely be said, therefore, that at his deathbed, too, Father Benson was present to console.

## III

It will now be possible to trace in connected detail the gradual realisation of his ideal home.

Inspired by John Inglesant, he already dreamt, when he was at Llandaff with Dean Vaughan, of imitating Nicholas Ferrar; and at Kemsing the dream grew yet more vivid, while on his Eastern tour it formed a regular topic of conversation.

At Rome the dream maintained itself :

"How delightful," he wrote, and would, I imagine, have quoted Browning had it not still been March, "the crocuses and snowdrops sound! Here we have to be content with pink roses; they are blazing away under firs and pines and palms, in the court below my window, with a fountain. And at Easter—such weather! air like clear water, brilliant sunshine; but I WANT THE COUNTRY. . . . I wish to goodness I was down in there too [in Cornwall, of which Mrs. Benson had written him a delicious picture], in a sensible, clean English atmosphere, instead of this feverish stuff (morally, not physically, feverish). . . . It is the very queerest life one can imagine, and most unwholesome. . . . One's only safeguard is that one *loathes* it. . . . I want a small cottage, as I said before, by the Atlantic."

"A small Perpendicular chapel and a white-washed cottage next door," he wrote again on March 2, 1905, "is what I need just now—preferably in Cornwall."

And a little later :

I want, and I mean (if it is permitted), to live in a small cottage in the country, say Mass and Office, and write books—I think that is honestly my highest ideal. I hate fuss and officialdom and backbiting, and I wish to be at peace with GOD and man.

The ideal survived, in fragrant contrast to the hustled, yet limited life of Cambridge.



Although, he writes to Mr. Rolfe on June 29, 1905, he has but little ready money :

I am perfectly at my financial ease so long as I sit still, and that, D.G., I can do for ever and ever without discomfort. [Some mental jerk, as it were, occurs here, and he immediately proceeds:] There is nothing to do here but to write. I have no faculties, and am not yet allowed to preach, and I have to hold in bitterness with both hands. A year or two will see the end of me here, I think, and then, if only things are favourable, I shall retire to a small country Mission in a sweet and secret place, and be perfectly happy for the rest of my days. Pray that this may be so, and then come and join me there ; and we will live in two small cottages, and not speak to one another till 2.30 P.M. I am intolerable and intolerant until that hour.

If you will not, I shall probably go to live with my brother, who is the most delightful person on the face of the earth. . . . Just now I am bursting with irritation ; and I think of all these things as I think of Paradise.

His solitude must, however, be a *shared* solitude.

*August 21.*

For myself, I want (1) solitude, (2) friends. Detached cottages seem to me to provide these ; solitude, 12 midnight-1 P.M. ; friends, 1 P.M.-4.30 P.M. ; solitude, 4.30 P.M.-8.30 P.M. ; friends, 8.30 P.M.-12 midnight.

The scheme grows between his hands ; in January, 1906, the solitude is peopled—it has become a colony.

There are schemes afoot here that will strain me to bursting point ; and it is absolutely necessary for my own schemes of liberty and efficiency that I should deny myself fiercely for three years. I simply don't know what to do to make more money ; I *must* have it somehow. Now here, briefly, is my future scheme : to found a colony in a distant county—in a small village of my friends, living apart, with complete individual freedom, with an opportunity for hermits to live as hermits, for writers to write, and mystics to pray, and artists to paint, and musicians to compose and perform. There shall be cottages,

each within an encircling wall, where everyone shall live his life ; there shall be no conventions or observances . . . and so on. I have half a dozen people who, I think, will do it, and I have my eye on others. I shall guard the people's liberties as fiercely as my own. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast . . . but the redeemed shall walk there.


In leaden hours he exhilarated his soul by working out the plan of the chapel, which was to stand beside his house, in great detail, disregarding at first any question of ways and means. In a big red note-book an accumulation of odd jottings, elaborately illustrated, survives. After a good deal of manipulation, as far as order goes, a clear plan of his architectural and decorative ideas can be traced.

The permanent chapel was to be 100 feet by 30, and its height not less than 30 feet to the spring of the roof. Its style was to be "Perpendicular, but simple" ; its roof, "flattish, as in Bishop Alcock's work [*v. Wilburton near Ely*]." The screens must be "plain Perpendicular, painted, with iron bars in west, gilded." The stalls, of dark oak ; the organ, of oak, with silver pipes. The High Altar was to be at least 8 feet by 3 by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ; and for the whole chapel, St. Mary's the Less at Cambridge was to supply analogies.

"When permanent chapel built," he writes, "it should be connected by a bridge from gallery of old chapel (then a hall) so that organ plays into both." [He added, perhaps considerably later] "No, it will be too expensive to turn chapel into hall. Plainly I must build chapel first, and then build on hall at such an angle that its lower end will communicate with kitchen, and its gallery, also at lower end, will communicate with organ chamber. . . . I see that it can easily be adapted anyway, if I am willing to give up orientation of chapel. I must add" [he wrote afterwards], "when I can a chantry chapel on opposite side to the house (like those at St. George's, Southwark). Beneath this there will be a chamber, and in wall, away from

church, recesses for coffins. Here I shall be buried; the altar will be dedicated to the Holy Souls. (Recesses as in Long Stanton Church, Cambridgeshire.) The altar in it, of stone, will stand on one step, against the wall. An opening in the floor will lead to steps—the chamber beneath being 7 feet deep: two rows of recesses—thus . . .”

Of the architectural features of the interior, the altar and the rood screen gave him most trouble. Of each he draws a number of sketches. His first design shows an altar, “carved in shallow niches, gilded edges,” and properly vested, surmounted by a low wall into which the Tabernacle is inserted; above this rises a white stone reredos containing the stone images of six saints, and above all this, the six tall candlesticks and crucifix, of “gilded iron with twisted shaft,” were to stand. The Tabernacle was to have an “iron door, black, with gilded iron over it in relief”; the communion rail was also to be of iron, gilded. The six saints were to be St. Austin of Canterbury, St. Hugh, St. Thomas, St. Edward the Confessor, and two local saints. St. Edward was hesitatingly substituted for St. Aidan, and one of the local saints permanently displaced St. Patrick. Later on, he revised this plan.

Possibly in permanent chapel a triptych might look well instead of stone affair. Think about Halifax’s chapel at Hickleton.  I am inclined to relinquish the idea of hall, and to build a chapel, like Garrowby,<sup>1</sup> at once—Tudor, rough-cast outside, plaster and tapestry within—stone mullioned windows high up. A rood-screen at altar-step. [Cf. Pugin’s screen near Lynford—two blues, with fleur-de-lis of reversed blues.] The altar must certainly be of stone, according to this plan, with a stone wall behind, on which the triptych stands. . . . One thing is clear. It is to be a *Tudor chapel*, not a Gothic church. . . . It must not be modern continental nor Anglican at all. And wood, stone, and iron must be used; no brass at all.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Halifax’s house near York

Plenty of paint, hangings, &c., in non-permanent things. But in essentials of worship, only stone and iron must be used. All must be subsidiary to these.

Hence altar must be stone, with its steps [altered in pencil to "step"]; screens may be wood and iron; images must be stone;<sup>1</sup> font, stone; stalls, pulpit, reredos-front, wood. No encaustic tiles may be admitted. Windows must have stone mullions, but roof may be wood. Lamps, &c., must all be iron, candlesticks, wood or iron.

The advantage of this style is that both Gothic and Renaissance articles may be used. Vestments may be half Gothic or Roman, but neither full Gothic nor French. Yet smaller articles—*e.g.* altar-vessels, may be Renaissance. No mosaics admitted—but frescoes, yes. There must be altogether huge plain spaces continually.

Later, he reverts to the "first temporary chapel."

"Yes," he says, "more and more I am coming to think [it] shall be like Halifax's at Hickleton. It shall have a gallery, without altars beneath; a ledge of wood round walls about 9 feet up, whence green hangings shall depend. The sanctuary shall be up one stone step, and on this a wooden footpave, with wooden altar and triptych and screen." After "inquire for a triptych in Belgium (?)" he adds the characteristic note: "No, carve it myself." The floor, if possible, shall be stone or red tiles or slate [he adds later; "No; stone." And later again, in pencil "paving stones."]. For the windows a single figure with coat beneath in each light, all set in clear glass. . . . East and west windows elaborate foliations above the five lights; the other windows plainish."

A difficulty was the disposition of the organ.

If the chapel is to be a *chapel*, how can Rood and Mary and John be anywhere but at entrance of ante-chapel? Therefore how can this be combined with organ-loft? The only solution I can see is not to have the ante-chapel roofed low, but to have a real rood-loft, with staircase from ante-chapel, and door from house also—thus . . . Yes; there must be a proper rood-screen, wide enough,

<sup>1</sup> Oddly enough, he afterward said he could not pray before a self-coloured statue. He wanted "plenty of paint."

high enough, with a long piece of stuff hung behind the figures, and a panelled boarding hiding pew on left and organ on right, high enough to hide these, but not reaching ceiling—thus . . .

At the foot of this screen he proposed to have altars of Our Lady and St. Hugh. He adds, "I think the chapel had better be panelled all round . . . the screen itself will carry on the top part of panelling."

After this follow a number of sketches of vestments. A white silk cope was to show, on its orphreys, St. Hugh, a local saint, and a pomegranate design. On the hood, a mother-of-pearl Host emerged from a chalice; amber and cornelians added value to the gold; while for his chalice and ciborium he wanted moonstones and turquoise.<sup>1</sup> For a purple chasuble, he designed an ivory-tinted Christ on a cross of pale yellow, itself "appliqué" on a wider cross of "heavy brown." The instruments of the Passion were all in brown and yellow. The six-winged seraphs for other vestments he described with especial care. Their wings were to begin near the shoulder "with pure blue, and shade to tips through peacock to green—cloth-of-gold halo and stole, gold fillet (silk) and girdle; while alb pale ivory, face, arms, and feet large, halo [this made a background for almost the whole figure], gold silk. Four of these stand in angles of cross on white chasuble."

The funeral furniture he designed no less carefully. The processional cross was a "cross potent elongate painted red on a black stem; figure, proper."

The chantry altar was to be "stone, cased below in black wood," and to have "three copper plaques let into front." These showed, "below, the souls in flames; above, St. Michael; in centre, other angels descending."

<sup>1</sup> These, you will notice, are the stones he allows to Elsa in *Lohengrin*, when he writes *Loneliness* and describes her dress.

The garden was to contain an altar of slate, for Corpus Christi, "dedicated to patron saint of place (?), with a little shelter over it." An unsuccessful sketch follows, and then : "No ; the altar must be in centre of rose-garden, with statue, thus— If possible with summer-house behind and water in front."

Of the house itself he wrote :

In the house, the furniture is to be perfectly simple—a table, chair, bed, chest of drawers, washing-stand, bookshelf in each room, with a prie-dieu with image or crucifix ; stained boards everywhere, skins, pair of antlers. So far as possible, the colours of white, brown, and green to be used (the object is to soothe, not to stimulate). Each private room, if possible, is to be with a recess for bed, across which will hang curtains.

[He suddenly adds :]

I want the whole house to be built in a wood.

[He continues :]

*For panelling*: of bedrooms, &c., use deal, stained deep brown. (Thus : a plain box-panelling design.) For library, have shelves running all round—with cupboards below, books above and panelling on top. In odd spaces use deep brown paper. [Directions for appliqué work follow : then] *N.B.*—Remember Portuguese brocades in Westminster ; and Mrs. X's blue angels. *N.B.*—Remember to make a workshop in house—near kitchen—with carving instruments and copper and iron work.

Afterwards the ideal has to be narrowed :

It seems to me probable that at first I shall not be able to build my chapel. Therefore I shall have to arrange a room or barn as well as I can.

If a barn, I will follow the old plan as well as I can, making all bare and plain. If a room, I must make another plan.

It must be *domestic*—hung with my hangings,<sup>1</sup> very dark. With an oak altar and reredos ; voluminous curtains ;

<sup>1</sup> He elsewhere writes : " For walls of chapel, make appliqué tapestry of arras-cloth. Blue for background, and upon it purple, white, reds, and brown-green — all of subdued tones, and illustrate life of St. Hugh."

rather mysterious, altar standing out from wall, with sacristy behind. A row of stalls at west end, with ante-chapel, and plain screen with iron bars. [Plan.]

Or why should not the chantry be built first? The difficulty is that it must be farthest from house, since graves are to be there. Therefore a small plain brick and timber cloister must be built.

As 1907 advanced, he seriously examined how much of this scheme was at all likely to be realised by him.

Still proposing to build his house from the beginning, he declares on July 12, 1907, "I believe by screwing and screwing every single penny I can *just* afford absolute necessities, and can survive ; but it will take all that."

And a week later he writes in answer to a remonstrance :

*July 21st.*

MY DEAR MAMMA,—I know. But I have got to go. The only question is whether I can have what I want, in the way of a house and furniture, or whether I can't. If I can't, I suppose I can do without them. You see, the break comes next year, when my time here ends ; if I go and settle in another place like this, I am done ; because I shan't get any forwarder in the way of money ; and I don't propose to go on all my life doing what I am not fitted to do, and neglecting what I can do. If I have to live in a workman's cottage on 2*d.* a year, then I must do it ; though I don't want to. If once I can make a start and get proper time for writing, by and by I shall get on. At present these three things, writing, preaching, and pastoral work, are simply too much ; and if I drop one of them, I am also done. I can't drop writing, because it is my only hope of retiring ; nor preaching, since if I drop this, pastoral work rushes into the vacuum ; nor pastoral work, because it's what I'm paid for. So there you are !

In the same red note-book which contains the material details of his plan, the most deliberate expression of the spiritual aspect of his ideal is to be found :

It appears to me that Almighty God means me to live

as a kind of modern solitary. The reasons for this are known to myself. Partly they are :

1. He has given me a desire for it. This has been growing steadily for many years.

2. He has given me a capacity for it. When I am alone I am at my best, and at my worst in company. I am happy and capable in loneliness ; unhappy, distorted, and ineffective in company.

3. As a priest I am fulfilling my functions by prayer and sacrifice sufficiently—I have no pastoral gifts. It is true I have a certain facility in preaching, but not much ; I have far more in writing. Preaching and writing are incompatible—at least both are only done moderately well together. For writing I do not need company or movement ; I write best when I rely most on imagination.

4. He has preserved me extraordinarily from intimacies with others. He has done this, not I. I have longed for intimacies, and failed to win them. It seems to me that this desire is exactly that which can be fulfilled towards Himself, in solitude.

5. He has put it in my power to live solitary.

Contrary to all my expectation, He has made me independent of any stipend.

Now I do not know what further signs of vocation there may be, but these are enough, in my opinion, to justify an experiment.

This is my intention, then :

To seek out some quiet place, far away from any church ; to buy, or rent on a long lease, an old farm or cottage ; to build, with the bishop's permission, a chapel open to the public, which I shall serve. My view would be that I should live there in extreme simplicity with a woman (Miss C.) and a boy, making devotional life very prominent—and next, literary life. Exercise, &c., would be simply subservient to these. I should wish also in time to have a house in the village near, where I could receive guests—and a room in my own house for a man or two. The primary object of the whole would be to produce as good a life as I could, rather than work. For example, I should consider whether I could not fast and abstain every day. I should normally keep silence except from 2-5, or some period like that.



The kind of day I should propose would be :

7. Rise.

7.30-8. Meditation.

8. Mass.

8.30-9. Meditation.

9. Coffee, &c.

9.45-12. Work.

12-1. Office, Angelus, &c.

1. Dine.

2-4.30. Exercise.

4.30. Tea.

5-8.30. Work, and some meditation.

8.30. Supper.

9.30-10.30. Office and letters.

11. Bed.

(If any would live the life with me, all this would be re-adapted ; but I do not expect this. If any in the village wished to co-operate, I would say Office aloud in chapel.

*e.g.* Matins and Lauds before Mass,  
Sext and None before dinner,  
Vespers after tea.)

On Sunday I should say Mass at 9, and preach afterwards, and Vespers and Benediction in the evening.

I should like to form a small choir—a quartette, perhaps. But this would entirely depend on circumstances. My ideal would be to have a boy who could sing, as my servant, and three men—one of them perhaps a friend in the house—who would sing on Sundays.

If this life developed at all I would open a house or houses in the village where like-minded people could live permanently. But they must not interfere with solitude and silence. Conceivably, if things prospered, I could co-operate with Norman Potter and buy a house in the village, or open a house of rest for people in trouble or ill-health.

It would be my wish to live chiefly in one room, with my bed, &c., screened off. Here I would breakfast and sup ; dining in a library. The library would be for the use of guests all the rest of the day. If possible, my room should look into the chapel through a window. Also, there seem to me many people, with whom God brings me into contact, who are poor and sensitive. If they could get

away from squalor and conflict they would blow like flowers. If I prospered then, why should I not build small houses here and there, and let these people live there? Many have just enough means for this.

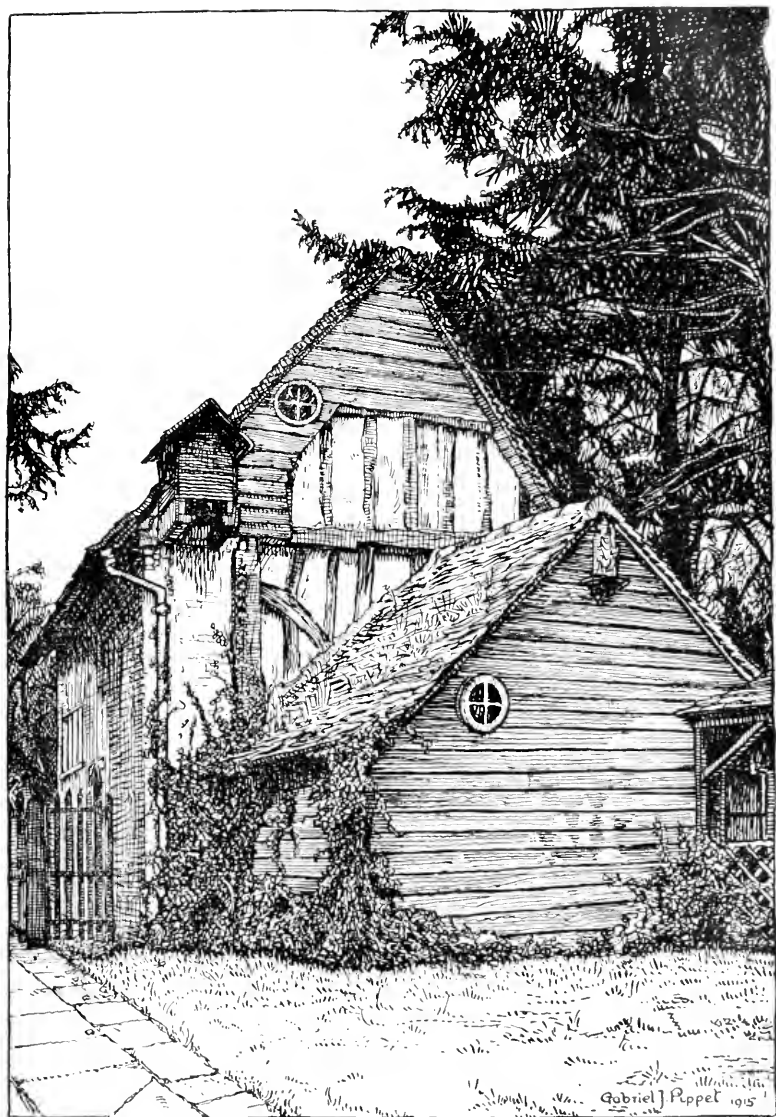
His letters now become full of his expeditions in search of a house. Moated granges, deserted manor-houses, romantic farms, castles going for a song, and turning out to be "about two inches from the railway," or to have no drains; he visits all, and continually is foiled. Always his mother's experience foresees and warns him of the fatal flaws which his enthusiasm forbids him, in each case, to imagine. I quote one letter only:

*November 1st.*

Arthur and I went over to Royston to see King James the First's old palace—a fragment of it—that is for sale. I am *really* considering it. Arthur strongly advises it. A heavenly little place, but bang in the middle of the town, which was not my view at all. However, I am going to look at other places first. But imagine the address, The Old Palace, Roy's town! Don't complain of this card please. There is a lot on it.

At last hope shows itself to be no mere false dawn.

"One day," writes Mr. A. C. Benson, "I was returning alone from an excursion, and passed by accident through Hare Street, the little village which I have described. I caught a glimpse of the house through the iron gates, and saw that there was a board up saying it was for sale. A few days later I went there with Hugh. It was all extremely desolate, but we found a friendly caretaker who led us round. The shrubberies had grown into dense plantations, the orchard was a tangled waste of grass, the garden was covered with weeds. I remember Hugh's exclamation of regret that we had visited the place. 'It is *exactly* what I want,' he said, 'but it is *far* too expensive. I wish I had never set eyes on it!' However, he found that it had long been unlet, and that no one would buy it. He might have had the pasture land and the farm-buildings as well, and he afterwards regretted that he had not bought them, but his income from writing was still small. However, he



HARE STREET CHAPEL: EXTERIOR

*From a drawing by Gabriel J. Piffet*



offered what seems to me now an extraordinarily low sum for the house and garden ; it was, to his astonishment, at once accepted. It was all going to ruin, and the owner was glad to get rid of it on any terms. He established himself there with great expedition, and set to work to renovate the place. At a later date he bought the adjacent cottage, and the paddock in which he built the other house, and he also purchased some outlying fields, one a charming spot on the road to Buntingford, with some fine old trees, where he had an idea of building a church."

"My house," he writes ecstatically to his mother on December 6th, "is mine." And to Mr. Molesworth he writes on January 7, 1908 :

My house is mine at last, an old big place with two acres of garden, and a queer building in the garden that I think must once have been used as a chapel. The house, I am *nearly* sure, was in papist hands a hundred and fifty years ago, and was used as a school, from which "Old Hall" at Ware is descended.<sup>1</sup>

In that case this building must have been their chapel, and Mass must have been said there. That pleases me. It is called "Hare Street House," near Buntingford. . . . I am charmed by it. I feel like half a young married couple, and go about buying fenders and rolling-pins at Maples. I don't go there till July, but I am putting a caretaker in meanwhile. . . . I am slowly collecting objects of bigotry and virtue to furnish with.

My word ! I am busy enough this year, I'm almost full up with preaching engagements for the whole of it . . . and for Lent in Rome in 1909, if I survive so long.

All else is as usual here. The Rector is continually away now, administering the diocese from Northampton, and I'm in charge here. We expect to hear who our new bishop will be in a few days. I both hope and fear. If we get a stuffy, timid man we're done altogether.<sup>2</sup>

It is not in the least astonishing that after this whirl of

<sup>1</sup> The school, now St. Edmund's College, certainly sojourned at Hare Street ; the house, if not pulled down, could scarcely have been other than Hare Street House.

<sup>2</sup> His best hopes were surpassed by the appointment of the present young and energetic holder of that see.

work he should write to Dom Bede Camm that for the first time in his life he felt really tired out "in a fundamental sort of way." Alas, exhaustion will be a recurrent note, now, in his letters, to his mother of course, but even to his friends.

I haven't written already, have I, this week? It seems a very short while since I did write, anyhow. And nothing has happened. I am still going on at 50,000 things.

I said Mass for Papa on Thursday, and shall for Nellie on the 27th. I wonder in what form it reaches them.

She on her side wrote :

I wish, though, that you weren't so satisfied to compare yourself with the cab-horse that could never be taken out of the shafts because he always fell down.

At times, in a moment of despondency, he would consider that it was writing that must be given up. Mrs. Benson protested energetically :

You sound horribly busy, and I can't bear to hear you say you don't know where writing will come in. O Hugh, you mustn't throw away such a Gift! I know that speaking and preaching are more *insistent*, and require less faith. The whole thing stimulates so. But you mustn't, *MUSTN'T*, let the *Finer Art* be squeezed out.

Another critic, far harsher, but believing perhaps that in sharpness lay salvation, urged precisely the temporary abandonment of literary work which Benson so feared.

"You show symptoms," he wrote, "of being infected with the common deplorable form of Modernism which is called Hysteria. Your story [*The Lord of the World*] is magnificent, your treatment of it superb; but you have utterly disdained to pay due attention to the minor uninteresting details of its form. There are loose phrases, no systematic punctuation or capitalisation, and printer's errors to make one tear one's hair. Now this may be a way of making money rapidly. Whether it is a justifiable way, you know best, or ought to. But I think you have now

come to the point when you ought to decide whether your career is creditable. You are a great popular preacher, a capacity simply sown with innumerable fatal pitfalls. You are also a great popular writer. And at the same time you suffer hideously from nerves, sleeplessness, and the other signs of masculine hysteria. You say that you must go on for six months more. Now must you? There was a pitcher and a well. You have examples. How much, or how long do you think you would be missed if you were to break down next Tuesday? Not a bit more or longer than if you were, of your own will, to take the sane and salutary step of stopping your headlong prancings now. I seriously mean that you ought to make up your mind whether you will preach or whether you will write, and give yourself to one career or another, all without advertising the fact in the papers."

Writing, however, he could not and would not abandon. He had by this time become perfectly clear in his own mind that he must have his house in the country, and, if possible, his colony of congenial souls, and that in view of this, to earn money was a necessary preliminary. Now in no other way could he do this so fast as by writing. I must pause a moment on this very real objective of his earlier career, the ensuring of a definite capital and income. It is not too much to say that so emphatic and frequent were his declarations that money he must have, and that at once, and in quantities, that many of his friends became quite nervous and began to comment anxiously about this trait. "Oh, why am I not a wealthy man?" is a wail which recurs in his letters of this period. I should like to advance three propositions. First, he wanted money in order to buy himself out of Cambridge, so to say, and build his house and found his colony. Second, he really did feel a certain inclination to be "sparing." "I recognise in myself," he once said—the exact words, unfortunately, I cannot obtain, but I am quite confident that the

sense is in no way distorted—"one grave vice—avarice ; and I have been giving it several shrewd slaps this morning by signing large cheques." It has been my privilege to see part, at least, of the list of his charities. In the circumstances they were large, sometimes very large, and very often secret. It remains that there were some singular episodes connected with this idiosyncrasy ; and the upshot—since I cannot offer detailed evidence—is, that Father Benson experienced herein a direct temptation, and conquered it. The third point must be, that he regarded his money-making powers as a downright joke. It seemed to him delicious that a Catholic writer should make such hauls. He was once told that the sales of a distinguished Catholic lady novelist came next after his. He chuckled derisively, and insisted that he personally made more than all other Catholic novelists put together. Yet the authoress of *Out of Due Time* and of *Horace Blake* has a wide enough reputation.<sup>1</sup>

Benson will never be understood until it is realised that he could, and often did, look upon nearly every part of his activities as a jest.

Here, then, are some quotations from letters of this

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the latter he wrote :

HARE ST. HOUSE, BUNTINGFORD,  
*September 12.*

DEAR MRS. WARD,—Do let me thank you for your book. Is it impertinent of me to say that it seems to me your finest book—far and away? The character-drawing seems to me quite *exquisite*.

And the situation seems to me perfectly fair. Here is the phenomenon of a death-bed return to an earlier faith. Of course both sides take different creeds ; and each side approaches it from its (respective) fundamental idea of the Universe ; and treats it quite reasonably and justifiably on the evidence.

And yet, *putting aside bias*, the Christian is more reasonable and less aggressive and suspicious than the non-Christian.

I think it is a triumph, chiefly because the dice are not loaded at all.

Very many congratulations. All messages to everyone.—Yours sincerely,

R. HUGH BENSON.



period which must be interpreted with the help of these three generalisations.

You know my dismal position. I am fighting with might and main to make enough to have about £150 per annum. At present I have about half that. Without that one is not really free. . . . I am sticking in the *Waster*. The *Hermil* proofs have arrived. And I can't imagine what I'm going to write about next. And if I run dry? Where am I? Oh, dear me!

I have been paying bills, with much satisfaction, and investing some more money—really I shall have about 2*d.* a year of my very own, if this goes on. And then for the COLONY.

He is fighting a certain publishing firm, he declares, for more money: "I'm going to have no sentiment about Catholic publishers, or rot of that sort." And Catholic or not, they have in time to come round to his terms.

I am gradually arranging a nice quarrel with my publishers; but they are so mild, they won't respond. I abused them for making such careful agreements, and "regretted the house did not think it worth while to encourage me to remain with them," and so on; and I got an acknowledgment of my "important" letter back and a promise that it "would be laid before the Directors"—and so on. Lor!

However, that this situation was really seriously felt is clear from the following letter too, written after he had been at Hare Street for almost a year:

*August 22, 1909.*

I am living on the very fringe: *e.g.* I never take cabs; I limit my bills for the entire household—three men, two girls, and a boy—to £3 weekly (last week it came to £1, 15*s.*). I never go to any entertainment; I never drink wine unless a guest is here; I smoke cigarettes at about 3*s.* 8*d.* a 100—and so on—on that scale. I don't do this for fun, but for the following reasons.

2. I want to have enough money to be able barely to exist, should I fall ill, or should my sales fall off. At

present I have £120 a year at the outside—not quite so much. If I had £300 I could just live—on the same scale that I do now. Therefore I save every single penny I possibly can. No doubt I could give up smoking and meat without any great loss ; but I don't want to unless it is necessary. I don't see anything else I could give up at all, anywhere. I don't even take in a paper.

3. This house is practically impossible in winter without heating apparatus to be put in.

Another possibility is that I should leave Hare Street, and take two rooms in London. But it seems to me that this would be rather a pity, just after having succeeded by incredible efforts in getting what I have wanted for sixteen years, at an extraordinarily low price. . . . Fifty pounds would mean wine, cabs, and a number of small things that would certainly add to my efficiency.

[He alludes to throwing up Hare Street and entirely altering his way of life.]

I don't say I shouldn't mind frightfully, because I should. But occasionally one has to do things that one minds frightfully. . . . If things were desperate I would give up meat first, then smoking. Then I should resolve to buy no more clothes for two or three years. I have only bought one suit in the last five years, as it is.

This has, however, anticipated. When the concluding arrangements were in train, he wrote :

The Archbishop has consented to everything cordially, telling me I am perfectly right in retiring from pastoral work, and that my job is obviously preaching and writing. So there we are !

And finally,

*August [?] 20, 1908.*

I am leaving here finally in June—at the end, and am going to settle down in my own house in the depths of the country—if that can be called “settling” which involves being away for every Sunday for at least the next year. But it will be heavenly to have a little time in the week. . . . It is near Buntingford, about thirty-two miles from London and is dead quiet. With not even a Church of England church in the village.

Yet the departure did not take place without regrets, despite many allusions like the following :

*March 20, 1908.*

I really am glad I am leaving. There's something the matter with this place. I think the University generates a coldness. . . . The congregation are as good as gold, but they are oddly cold. People coming here notice the same thing in Cambridge.

Of this coldness he was all along convinced. He felt it, Mr. Shane Leslie assures us, already at Llandaff House. He had planned out, even there, his campaign against it, which issued into those alternately mystical and controversial, seductive and denunciatory sermons which he was to preach in the Cambridge Catholic pulpit. His "quavering, but fearless voice" rose suddenly in the "Cambridge desert," and from the neighbouring city all men had flocked out to hear him. The Baptist foretold a Christ to come. Benson said Rome was already there, victoriously confronting the "capital of East Anglican Puritanism," which had allowed its Cromwellian spirituality, even, to evaporate. Of that "iron-sided mysticism" little remained, but only a predominant lethargy, and "rare revivals," and a cold intellectualism. Even Oxford, in some quaint sense, was better. At least she had burnt the Reformers whom Cambridge, to her lasting ill, had produced. At least Oxford had the romance (Mr. Leslie writes) attaching to those lost causes for which she made a home ; Cambridge, he declares, is but the home of discovered causes ; yet even the psychic research for which she, more than another, is responsible, has issued, not into the science she favours, but into that spiritualism which is the surest wreck, Father Benson held, of all that is most truly intellectual and spiritual. What, after all, if undergraduates played, even with the loftiest intentions, with planchette ; if ghosts were

evoked, however piously, by Anglican ministers whose Holy Water proved yet unavailing for their exorcism? To deal thus with the spiritual world was, he declared, like holding a smoking concert in a powder magazine on behalf of an orphan asylum. Once more, he declared that the Church alone knew how to satisfy these desires, transmute them, and supplement them. To him came, as Mr. Leslie puts it, a "coterie" of "roving Ritualists, æsthetics with or without a moral sense, reformers of Church and State—in fact, all the budding brotherhood of cranks, for each of whom he sought his proper niche within the multi-moulded fabric of the Church." Even the fanatic who interrupted Benediction with a cry for brotherhood among Churches, received the "Pax" from Benson, and was declared to be suffering from suppressed vocation to the Carmelites. . . . All this had its pathos as well as its quaint charm. Of course he saw through, at his hours, all that in this "much business" was melodramatic and illusory. Of course he knew that he was tiring himself out on trifles. Yet in it all he too descried, with perfectly steady eye, what was real and divine. And this remained.

Confused, a moment, by the dust and hubbub, he wrote in bewilderment :

To-day is the 20th, so I am writing now. But what is there to say except that one is aware of to-day and to-morrow?

But quickly recovering himself, he added :

. . . Also, it seems to me more and more that since one remembers all the beauty and splendour, it is these things that are eternal, and that the details one forgets are not.

And of his own life in Cambridge the details are being forgotten, or exalted into myth. Yet the quintessential remains intact, and "for many whom he first met as undergraduates," writes one who owes so much to him, "he remains always the symbol of their spiritual youth and his."

## PART III

AUGUST 1908—OCTOBER 1914

Ici commence la pleine mer, ici commence l'admirable aventure, la seule qui soit égale à la curiosité humaine, la seule qui s'élève aussi haut que son plus haut désir.

MAETERLINCK, *La Mort*.



## CHAPTER I

### AT HARE STREET HOUSE

O happie harbor of the Saints,  
O sweete and pleasant soyle,  
In thee noe sorrow may be found,  
Noe greefs, noe care, noe toyle !

Thy gardens and thy gallant walkes  
Continually are greene ;  
There growe such sweete and pleasant flowers  
As noe where else are seene.  
*From Hierusalem, my happie home.*

#### I

THE chapters which must describe Hugh Benson's later years, spent by him with Hare Street House as his headquarters, appear to me to be difficult to write, because they have no landmarks. Six years is the longest period, since his childhood, which he spent anywhere ; yet as a period it is amorphous : it is undifferentiated within itself, and, alas, unfinished, for the human historian at least. The journeys to Rome and America are a novel feature, no doubt, and the years are punctuated by the publishing of books ; yet in this is marked no progress or development. His elevation to the ecclesiastical rank of papal chamberlain had no importance for his life. His operation in January, 1913, did indeed mark a certain crisis, and at that moment he may definitely be said to have stepped across into middle age. But at that time not two full years were left to him. I have thought it best, then, to try first to make a picture of Hugh's house and of the life he lived in it—and

if here I have seemed to dwell upon the trivial and external, I have done so because precisely in these details his personality expressed itself when he was most of all his own master and at his ease ; and if I have been tempted to resent my own description of these privacies of another man's life, and feared horribly lest good feeling should again and again be hurt by it, I have remembered that I write direct from the lips, or, at any rate, with the leave, of the innermost of his circle ; and somehow Hugh Benson has come to be a man of whom everyone says everything.

Then I have wished to give an account of his exterior activity as a priest—his preaching, his apostolate, and his direction of souls ; then, working inwards, of that strange department of his interests which was occupied with the abnormal and preternatural ; then, of Hugh Benson as an artist ; then, of that preface to his inmost life which was spent, so to say, near Gethsemane and Calvary, and was full of the mystery of pain and fear and loneliness ; finally, of that most interior life of all, and of the dawn of death.

In this period letters are far fewer. And if, hitherto, I have asked to be forgiven for constant quotation, I will ask to have it here believed that I do not speak only from surmise. Still, in these pages dealing so much with a more interior world, the part of subjective bias is bound to be greater.

. . . . .

Any of Monsignor Benson's friends who had the good fortune to be asked to Hare Street would witness that the ritual observed on these occasions practically never varied, especially if he himself should travel down with you. You waited for him in the mephitic atmosphere of Liverpool Street Station, till, within a moment or two of the train's departure, Hugh arrived, "very fussed," in his enormous



overcoat, his Trilby hat, rather dusty, carrying his own bag.<sup>1</sup> You forgot this film, so to say, upon his flashing personality, the moment he caught sight of you. The charm of his address and his delightful smile and affectionate hand were all you found yourself aware of. In the third-class carriage, after a breathless greeting, he would yawn. "I must pray," he said; "simply loads of Office to say, and, oh! I'm so t-t-tired." His breviary was produced, and he relapsed into mumbling silence. At St. Margaret's you changed; and in the train, starting from another platform, Hugh at last would talk.

At Buntingford a high dog-cart was waiting, driven by Mr. Reeman, his invaluable servant. You drove through undramatic roads, with the gentle undulation of the Hertfordshire country on either side, pasture and ploughed land and some fields where crops are sown. Willows, beeches, and elms make shadowy landmarks, or stand in great masses of firmer colour; and among them a few houses show, and here and there the needle-like Eastern steeple rises from its squat tower. I can imagine this country having its charm and even its romance, but especially in certain autumn lights, when clouds are torn for the sunset, and the strong rays burn on yellow leaves; or even when the air is full of water, and the fields pale, and the leaves whirling in grey winds. It has its peace too, in the golden haze of late summer or a serene and early autumn, when the outlines, always muffled, are still further fused, and only the bees are loud in the cottage gardens. But, frankly, the neighbourhood needs helping out, I think, by glamour

<sup>1</sup> He abruptly announced, one day, that there were dirty priests and clean priests, and that one of his ordination resolutions was to be a dirty one. This had nothing to do, need I say, with grime; he hated that sort of dirt "at least as much as sin"; but it implied shabbiness, and included inextensive shaving. In Ireland he amazed and edified the Convents by his threadbare suit.

of some sort or another ; a touch of terror, as in autumn, or of lazy summer splendour will do what the dismal winter and harsh spring cannot.

The village shows itself ; you enter its irregular street at right angles, and turn down it to the left ; on your right a paling, a gate, and then a wall, with lime trees behind them, are your first glimpse of home. You pass them, turning in beyond, to the yard, while this is what first is reached by one motoring from Cambridge, and for him, the house is almost what he first encounters in the village. Should Hugh Benson not have been with you on your journey, this is where he would have met you, on the doorstep, very much his own master, taking you in at once in every detail, and rather breathless in his welcome. You were shown your room ; you were shouted for, in some few minutes, for whatever meal might already be awaiting you.

As for the house, it is described deliciously, rather *en grand*, in *Oddsfish*, with all Benson's own improvements. There was a village tradition, he says, that a house had stood there for 600 years, "but the oldest work I can see in it," he adds, "is but Tudor. The foundations, however, may be much older."<sup>1</sup> The lovely gate in front of the house dates from Charles II : the "Fore-Court" gate, with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary in the scroll-work, and a Priest's Hat, was of Benson's own designs, "drawn out" by Mr. Gabriel Pippet, and not erected till 1912. A little paved path leads from the gates to the front door, and round the front and north side of the house. Neither

<sup>1</sup> Many details and quotations in the next pages are taken from an amusing little *Chronicle of Hare Street House*, which he began in June, 1914, and of which the title-page is to be found in the Appendix, p. 464. It is written throughout in a pseudo-archaic style, Tudoresque, with entertaining lapses into modern "tone."

was this put down till 1912. The flagstones came from the House of Commons, parts of which were being repaved. "Aren't they splendid?" he kept inquiring, as pleased as a child. "And every one of them hallowed by the p-passing footsteps of Lloyd George . . .!" The low brick walls, capped with stone, dividing these walks from the lawn, were put up quite late, in 1914. He was particularly fond of them, and I think he liked the idea that nothing in the shape of a conveyance could quite reach the door. It was inconvenient, but seignorial; and he introduces this feature, on a large scale, in the Medds' house, in *The Coward*. Plants stand there in rough pots, and the lawn goes right and left, between the house and the lime-tree fence and road. The house-front is of Georgian brick, mellow with age; the parapet projects well above the roof-line; the tiled symmetrical roof rises above it, and two stacks of moulded Tudor chimneys stand on its either angle. For the restoration of these roofs Benson had to pay heavily before the "bare and desolate" place was habitable.

You entered, by the front door, directly into the outer hall, small enough, but not undistinguished, with its antlers carved wood, and pious pictures. To the left is the dining-room; to the right the library; again, to the right, by the side of the stairs, and giving on to what was called the inner hall, hung with a quaint tapestry—Hugh Benson's work—representing Joan of Arc, was the little Parlour of the Grail. The rest of the ground floor was occupied by the kitchen and its offices. It was that way, between kitchen and dining-room, that a passage led to the stable-yard and its coach-house buildings. The stairs are panelled—a piece of work begun in 1912, Monsignor Benson carving the panels. The emblems on the first

flight were personal and historical — monograms, for example, of guests ; those on the second flight are of the Passion — many of the pictures hanging here are the originals of Mr. Pippet's illustrations of the Nativity play, and others. A plastered "hiding-place" (as Father Benson would believe it) over the door from the inner to the back hall was found ; and gradually the steps were improved, and changed, on the first flight, for old oak. On the first floor, three rooms face the road : a large one, at the south-west corner, called the nursery ; a "tapestry" room, over the hall, of which I will describe the tapestry below ; and Hugh's own room, over the dining-room. This communicated with an old powder-closet, which made for him a tiny dressing-room.

It has its pathos, I think, that George Herbert, once disesteemed, here came into his own ; his *Holiness on the Head* hangs, illuminated, over the wash-hand stand. In Benson's own room, the panelling was perfected in 1910, and a Gothic arch of soft church stone was found behind the cheap fireplace. All through the house the fireplaces were altered, though in the room above the library, known as the Captain's room, owing to its prolonged tenancy by Captain Anderson, a friend of Monsignor Benson's (1910 to Easter, 1911), the fine original fireplace needed no improvement. This was the room which ranked as haunted.

In his *Chronicle* he writes :

. . . Other sayings of the house were (1) that there was a hidden treasure in it ; (2) that there was an underground passage leading from it ; (3) that it was haunted ; (4) that in "old days" it had been a great place for entertainments. . . . As regards (1), I have heard no more. As regards (2), I have seen, when the grass is newly cut on the lawn, what looks like the roof of a tunnel in outline, running

as from the south-east corner of the great cellar. And a young man in the town once told me that he had been a child in the house, and remembered stamping in the orchard to hear the hollow sound. As regards (3), two or three ladies told me that they had heard an old man groaning, it seemed, in the long orchard walk. . . . Further, the same young man told me of the ghost, and that the sound of voices talking was often heard between the floor of the Doctor's room and the ceiling of the kitchen.<sup>1</sup> So much for the common talk I heard.

When Benson spent the night, which he did, on and off, for some two years, in the haunted room, "the only trouble I had here was a dream, with an old man's groan in it." Mildly alarmist anecdotes were from time to time forthcoming. In 1911 a servant,

sitting on the stairs while we were at dinner, heard the door of "the Captain's" or the "haunted" room open, steps come out, and return.

Also, A—— S——, the artist (once a prize-fighter), had, on two nights out of three, while sleeping in that room, heard steps come upstairs, the handle turn, the steps enter, and a voice, as of a "tall old woman," say either "Is that you?" or "Are you there?" He felt no fear, but only an inability to move or speak, and a tingling in every limb, as of electricity. Father ——, to whom I related this, told me that he, in the "nursery" next door, had heard the steps, as if on plain boards, come up one night, enter the haunted room, and come out and downstairs again.

The remaining rooms on the floor above have their quaint interest; through one the rain-water is carried from the roof by a raised leaden channel into the gutter outside. Most of these rooms were panelled, but the panelling process was very slow. Much excellent oak was discovered here and there under painted deal. He made use of all this,

<sup>1</sup> The Doctor's room was immediately behind Father Benson's and over the passage and part of the kitchen. It got its name from Dr. L. Sessions, who was much there.

and collected odd bits of oak, table-legs and the like, which, all of them, were of service.

It is perfectly true that Benson regarded his house as a kind of nucleus of that colony he kept dreaming of. He certainly gathered around him a number of associates, some of whom remained there a considerable time ; while, near the house, as we shall see, houses and cottages were let to his friends. Even, he would draw out elaborate schemes for the co-ordination of his men-friends into an eccentric Order, with its odd evening-dress (it was always, of course, to dress for dinner) and customs. At no time was this much more, in detail, than a joke. He was quite aware of what the associates-to-be remorselessly pointed out to him, that as long as he was there, he, of course, would consent to no position other than its head ; when he was not, the sole connecting link would be snapped—the brothers would fly to the world's four corners. Already before his death, marriage had stolen two of them from his company. But the floating idea that this fraternity existed was probably helped considerably by the very general belief that he imposed upon his friends a rule of life.

A rule indeed exists, and is as follows :

#### HARE STREET

7.	Rise : so as to be down by	}	Silence.
7.30.	Mental prayer.		
7.50.	Prime.		
8.	Mass and Angelus.		
8.30.	Lauds and mental prayer.		
9.	Breakfast.	}	
10-12.	Work alone.		
12.	Angelus—letters.		
12.45.	Terce, Sext, None [Vespers].		
1.	Lunch and recreation or siesta.		
2-3.50.	Manual work preceded by visit to B.S.		
4.	Tea and recreation.		

4.30-7.30.	Work alone.	} Silence.
7.30-8.	Vespers and Rosary.	
8.	Dinner and recreation.	
9.30.	Spiritual Reading, Angelus.	} Silence.
9.45.	Night Prayers—Compline.	
10-10.30.	Matins : examination of conscience.	
10.30.	Letters.	
11.	Bed.	

1. When guests are in house, keep rule as much as possible. Have no conversations before 11.30 A.M., nor after 9.30 P.M.

2. Manual work *may* be substituted for "work alone" when desirable.

3. When returning from journey, all office *may* be said in train, except Compline.

4. Keep same amount of mental prayer when away—if possible at same times.

5. If mental prayer is omitted, make up during day.

To guard against—

Slackness in rising,

" " office,

" " mental prayer,

Pride in speaking of self,

" " judging others,

" " dramatic arrangement in thought,

Irritation in judging, ) Look out for symptoms.

" " speaking. )

But it is not true that any rule existed for visitors, save such as courtesy dictated, lest they should interrupt or fatigue their host ; his own day was not so much "ruled" as mapped out in view of efficient work.

He was normally not late for his Mass, which he said in the chapel at 8.30. This chapel had been the old brew-house of the place, and was in 1908 linked on to the house, by Reeman, by means of a roofed passage called the cloister. An old bakehouse adjoining was pulled down, and of the

materials was built a tiny sacristy, through which you pass in order to enter the high-roofed chapel itself. Little by little the chapel grew to be the strange shrine it is to-day. Let me speak frankly. Though it will create in some, less than does many another room in the house, the sense of having been put carefully but quickly together, rather than of having grown, yet, save for those few and fewer for whom it is instinct still with Hugh's live presence, it is bound to create something of the effect of a stage set for an actor who is not there. It is as quaint and interesting and even charming as you will ; but it is so quaint, so *astonishingly* interesting, that you feel it demands too much attention—indeed, that it exacts an explanation. When Hugh was in it, he pervaded it ; he extended his personality over it ; all its adornments linked themselves up round him, and you understood what was the meaning, or vital principle, of this shrine, where all was so clearly other than the accustomed and conventional, yet so actual, so evidently chosen, so utterly not haphazard. It is mediaeval and it is modern, Tudor and contemporary ; you need to be assured that it is not the work of an antiquarian or even of a dilettante ; in short, you have to know Hugh and get *his* atmosphere, before you can understand his chapel and fill it with its own. I shall not be grudged, even by Hugh's closest friends, for whom his chapel means so much, and holds such treasures of memory, this expression of what so many feel. After all, whatever of himself (as his theory will have it) clings to its walls and is in all into which he "*put* himself," can be communicated only to those whose souls are properly attuned for the echoing it ; and not for every pilgrim will his spirit come forth upon the altar-steps to welcome him.

The chapel looks, from within, taller than it is long ;



but a minute organ-loft,<sup>1</sup> whence a tapestry depends, shortens it somewhat,<sup>2</sup> and again, the sanctuary is fenced off by a tall rood screen, carved, or more truly *hacked* out by the forceful carving of Monsignor Benson and his friend Dr. Sessions. Old, worm-eaten wood supports the actual rood-beam; the rough crucifix itself looks down the more compelling for its very sternness.

Where the plaster wall shows between heavy oak, it is stained a greyish lilac, an admirable tint, and scarcely a vacant space is without its monogram. The walls are crowded with a strange array of saints—gifts, and some of them quite old, or home-carved. St. Gabriel and St. Michael display wide wings beneath the rood itself; St. Sebastian points dolorously to his arrows; a great St. Thomas stands with sword struck deep into his skull; St. Hugh, of course; St. George, an old model; evangelists and apostles; St. Joseph, and to the right Our Lady clothed and, on her festivals, heavily jewelled.<sup>3</sup>

In 1910 he writes :

We are getting on with the stalls in chapel, and have begun an image of Our Lady—who must be called “Notre Dame des Diables,” as her bracket is going to be supported by a mass of demons and heresies and serpents of all kinds.

And a little later :

We have practically done the screen. Certainly it makes people outside feel outsiders; but I think that’s rather good. And the statue is becoming superb. [Sketch.]

The devils and heresies that form the base are magnificent. The heresies have closed eyes and open mouths, because they do not see the Light, and proclaim falsehood;

<sup>1</sup> The front of this loft is made with material from an old Nonconformist chapel once on Hugh’s land and destroyed by him.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. George Grossmith gave Mgr. Benson the small American organ there.

<sup>3</sup> A number of the jewels were the gift of Sir Charles Paston Cooper; three, of Mr. E. F. Benson. St. Roch, St. Anne, and St. Barbara stand there too, and St. Robert, and a little image of Our Lady behind the larger one.

and the devils (faces, dogs, toads . . .) have open eyes and closed mouths—for they “believe also and tremble.” And they are all tied and twisted in with the Great Serpent, on whose head Our Lady’s foot rests.

Panels of glass were inserted in the windows; escutcheons were painted on the stall-ends, and two *altarini*, of St. Hugh and of the Passion, were erected by the screen. Over one hung a wax crucifix, of Italian manufacture, presented by Miss Englefield, made so as to open and display the entrails, realistically and minutely modelled. A diminutive side-chapel was thrown out on the right, for the Christmas crib, and an ark which should contain relics. One of these was of the True Cross, the generous loan of Miss E. Kemble Martin.<sup>1</sup>

At, then, the old Jacobean chest, with emblems of the Passion gilded on its panels, which served for altar, Hugh said his Mass, quickly and without mannerism, regarding it essentially as his priestly *business*, his *opus Dei*—sacrifice for God—and not edification for the populace, nor, even an affair of personal devotion. He was fond of emphasizing the obliteration, by the conventional vestments, of the human outline; so, too, from tone and gesture must the merely *personal* be remorselessly eliminated. The idea of prayers elegantly “read to” an audience was repulsive to him; neither were pious sighs or inequalities of voice to be allowed as tribute to his own feelings.<sup>2</sup> The whole action was *hieratic*.

<sup>1</sup> It would be tedious were I to catalogue the gifts which pious ladies made to the chapel. They were received with gratitude and given with affection, and it is the memory of this which, in each case, is the permanent reward. Presents were showered upon Hugh. He took, because he knew he gave; and in all cases was most courteously unsentimental. He would laugh, using his customary nickname, and with a brusque unchivalry that never hurt, at those trusted friends who never were to be allowed, in any conceivable circumstances, behind the barrier of his Screen.

<sup>2</sup> Still, his masculine yet slightly feverish energy pursued him even here. His thumps on his chest, in the *Confiteor*, were tremendous.

When Father Reginald Watt came to stay with him in 1912, till the Little Hormead presbytery should be ready to receive him, Father Benson began by serving his Mass before his own, which then was at 8.30. He used, however, to continue his private devotions with such concentration that he at last produced the effect of answering *Amen* and *Et cum spiritu Tuo* simply on the general principle that by now, surely, something ought to be said.

"He had," Father Watt has written to me from France, "a great habit of 'crouching' in his stall while saying his prayers; and though I am convinced that he spent all his time in prayer—he was the least sleepy person I have ever known—I used often to tease him about going to sleep and bobbing up like a 'Jack in the Box' if anyone banged the church door."

The dining-room, hung with his green arras and furnished with old oak and lit by candles in brass sconces—electric light was put in in September, 1911—is soothing to the nerves, and suited to the difficult meal of breakfast. Bored terribly by the bacon and eggs on which he considered himself fed wherever he went, he insisted on a variety of daily dishes, and never for two days running tolerated the same.<sup>1</sup> At breakfast one well may pray to be spared the minor chastisements of Providence. On a pathetic occasion, however, the day began badly for Hugh Benson. An especially prized cotta, edged with lace, had been returned from the wash with the lace *starched*. He rushed into the dining-room with the cotta in his hand, and, being wisely left alone by his companion, after a few moments of vituperative stamping round the room, settled down to his meal. But in his agitation he took much more

<sup>1</sup> He ate fast, and moderately, without thinking much about his food. He noticed it if it were bad. I ought to make an exception for savouries, which he loved. His list extended to quite a hundred, I am told.

milk than he meant to with his porridge, so that, when he came to his tea, he was still mumbling, "Starch," "Cloth," "Lace," "Ridiculous woman," and there was hardly any left. Then there was a pause, then a sort of suppressed roar, "You've taken all the milk." It was indicated that there was plenty more in the kitchen. He stamped to the serving-hatch, rang, and shouted, "Margaret!" "Reeman!" "Reeman!" "Margaret! . . ." The milk came; with tea in one hand, and a plate of devilled chicken in the other, still mumbling, he set out for his place—and tripped, over the edge of the carpet. . . . "There was a moment when anything might have happened;" and then he laughed, and the tale became a domestic jest of his, and invariably concluded, "But you *did* have all the milk!"

Are such anecdotes too trivial? All men's lives are made up of these tiny episodes, quickly forgotten, and scarcely to be repeated. Yet just because it is of them a man's unofficial existence, so to call it, is composed, they seem to contribute to a lifelike picture of Hugh Benson's days at Hare Street.

Breakfast itself, then, was silent for the most part, while Hugh read his letters, which he spent most of the morning answering. Sometimes he would ask a friend to help him. "My dear," he would say, tossing him over some envelopes and post-cards, "you *are* going to answer a few of these for me, aren't you? . . . Lord! another sermon! Tell him I'm booked for every Sunday for the next two years." "Tell her I can't see her, and don't put on the address." "Say, 'Next Sunday at the Carmes, 12.15.'" At intervals he pretended, in these hours, to go over his household accounts, wisely entrusted, in reality, to his housekeeper, Margaret; and at 11.30 he would settle down for twenty minutes to his *Daily Mail*. He sat then working in the

small parlour most of the morning, and smoking Cope's Turkish cigarettes all the time, kicking off his shoes as he worked, and wrapping up his feet, when they grew cold, in the Guard's blanket which lay upon the floor.<sup>1</sup> This small room is where the tapestry of the Grail is hanging. Its idea was Hugh's; its design was mainly Mr. Pippet's; Dr. Sessions and Hugh Benson executed it. Unforgettable pictures remain of these two men crawling about on the floor in pursuit of the pieces of coloured stuffs cut out from Mr. Pippet's paper models, and then laboriously stitching them on to the dull brown canvas, and exulting, when it was finished, that no woman's finger had contributed so much as one single stitch.

Over the fireplace the Grail is seen "rose-red," as Tennyson and *Parsifal* will have it, in its little House, on a vested altar, adored by Angels, and in a glory. All the colours are subdued, but rich, and this is the most radiant point. A deep blue sea glows in the background. The road to the shrine passes round the room, and the tapestry narrows to leave room for the door, where a small bridge fills the space vacant of travellers. Soon these are seen, Sirs Percivale, Galahad, Bors, Lancelot, and Gawain. Then follow an Archbishop, St. Robert, "Monsignor," "Doctor," Pictor, Artifex and Hortor (Hugh's servant and the gardener) and Jack, the dog. The likenesses have their piquancy. When the sunlight, broken by waving branches, plays upon the figures, or the wood fire leaps and falls among its piled-up ashes, the procession comes to life, and ambles placidly round the frieze on its way to the shining Cup, full of God's Blood, over there on an Altar, which Nevill Fanning had tried to find, and to teach the small boy to find, in woods and winds and under a sky of dancing sunlight.

<sup>1</sup> At different periods he wrote in different rooms, but at any one period it was always the same room, library, parlour, or bedroom, which he used.

The other piece of appliqué work which has become generally known is in the "tapestry room," where guests—especially Anglican clergymen, he once mischievously remarked—should be put to sleep. It was a *Danse Macabre*, or procession of Death, a modernised form of those mediaeval picture-sermons of which Holbein's is perhaps the most famous. Death, playing on his pipes, summons mankind to follow him; the Pope walks first, and each personage is attended and parodied by an appropriately vested skeleton. The King and Queen come next, and then a cardinal, and then a little boy, by whom Death walks, an angel, with a skull that is little more than a mask, half shown. Between the nun who follows, and a monk, a gilded youth leans upon his cane; with him Death, more than anyone a man of the world, hobnobs, smoking his huge cigar. Then the fine lady, then the beggar, a keeper, a cripple, a schoolboy. Then (ruthless modernism) a suffragette, and close to her, a friar. This has carried the black canvas, with its deep border of a tawny so grim as to be all but brown—the tint of unbleached wax, in fact,—from the door to the left of the four-posted bed as you face it. It passes behind the canopy; and in what remains of that side of the room, and on the short fourth side, you see the funeral of Death himself, a note of joy, though the colours still are so austere, and in reality the tapestry reveals itself as a hymn of Resurrection. By the cornice the great texts run: *Memento homo . . . immutemur habitu. . . .* Man is reminded that he is but dust: he must fast in sackcloth and in ashes, but before a God who is merciful and royal for the pardoning of sins. In Hugh's own room, Death showed himself no more dismally than in the skull (from the Great Pyramid, I think) which sat above a doorway; and consolingly, in the emblems of the Passion on the four posts of his

bed, where they stand between its rather bright blue curtains.

For a short time before lunch he used to go to the chapel to say some office, and this was the hour he devoted to hearing confessions or giving such spiritual counsel as his "colony" might seek from him. Lunch was a cheerful meal; the morning's work and the plans for the afternoon gave topics for the talk; he experimented then "with odd wines," a friend remembers.<sup>1</sup>

After coffee, Hugh changed into his grey flannel trousers and striped Eton shirt, and with his guests migrated to the garden. If you turn the south-west corner of the house, you find the lawn on to which the library and parlour windows give; yew-trees (the magnificent colours they take in evening sunlight; and their value at all times, in a brilliant garden; and a certain English, and again melancholy, romance attaching to them, made yew-trees always dear to Benson) screen the chapel; beyond, the orchard lies. In its further corner, to the right, is a small mound, built of earth and rubbish in 1909, with a heavy cross planted upon it. It is close to this, in the orchard, that Hugh is buried. Shrubs encircle all these parts. In Hare Street Close, just behind the cross, built by him in 1909, Miss Lyall, daughter of Sir Alfred Lyall, now lives,<sup>2</sup> who had at first occupied Hare Street Cottage, a tiny place of plaster and wood, with its barn, giving upon the main road. In the little paddock between Close and Cottage, is the engine-room, working the electric light and the water supply. A thick belt of hazels, through which a shaded path runs beside the orchard on the left, divides it from quite a large

<sup>1</sup> In the fervours of 1904 he declared he found "all champagne filthy"; later he revised this view.

<sup>2</sup> The large portrait of Monsignor Benson in his Papal Chamberlain's robes, now hanging in the dining-room, is by Miss Lyall.

garden lying behind the house. It is full of vegetables and fruit-trees, and on the farther side is an old-fashioned greenhouse, with real character in its design, and used once by Hugh as a room to carve in, till he fitted up a small place in the house itself. Immediately behind the house, near the chapel, a new rose-garden was still, at the time of Hugh's death, in process of being made. It is dreamt of in *None Other Gods*, and is responsible for the burst of rose-lore in *Loneliness*.

He gardened with indescribable zest. A visitor has told me that one day at Hare Street she looked out into the garden, which blazed with summer life, and exclaimed at what she saw there, crying out, "After all, the animals have a more exciting time than we. What thrill have we got, comparable to that of a cat stalking a bird in the bushes?"

"Oh," he cried eagerly, "I feel exactly like that about lots of things—my gardening, for instance."

Hugh climbed about the trees, glazed and painted green-houses, mocked his friends for their weakling spade-work—potatoes still grow, they jokingly aver, in the rose-garden where Mr. Howden dug. No bird was to be shot or to be trapped there; it was to be their paradise; if birds and fruit were incompatibles, it was the fruit which must be sacrificed. Through the bushes his cat proceeded, "dumb, inscrutable, and grand," or was borne slung round his neck like a collar. It was not beautiful, exactly, but, as he declared, "*It is always a cat.*" Of all beasts, dearly as he loved horses and dogs, I believe he loved cats best. In his letters, allusions to cats have already been numerous. A writer in the *Rosary Magazine* tells how she saw him one day walk along a quiet street at Cambridge and stop to stroke every cat that appeared, momentarily, at the gates of the little



gardens. . . . At Brighton, once, a cat ran up and tried to push through the railing of a house to reach him. It was too fat ; he put his hand through, stroked it till it purred, and exclaimed, with his boyish laugh, "A large, perfectly square black cat !" <sup>1</sup> He once spent a whole day bicycling about Cambridge to find a home for a Persian cat he had never seen. Should he still, by a certain date, have failed, it must be destroyed. "Give him a respite for another day," he wired, as time grew short. The home was found, and from it, to Father Benson's despair, the cat was afterwards stolen. His books pay faithful tribute to his pets. It is true that in the rarified atmosphere of *The Light Invisible* pets would find life difficult ; but in the historical novels horses and dogs and kestrels return and return, lovingly detailed. I think it is in *Come Rack, Come Rope*, and of course in *The Coward*, that most sympathy is shown with horses—yet, curiously, Hugh Benson's management of horses was not too practical. There are tales of his pursuing a pony over the lawns at Hare Street till it was nearly frantic ; a calmer call, with an offered lump of sugar, brought it off peaceably and at once. Jack and Jill in *Initiation* are unforgettable ; and I was getting anxious lest after all the parrot might figure in no novel until Rhadamanthus thus appeared in *Loneliness*, and with him the kitten Maximilian. I need not say that to all these creatures a whimsical psychic life is attributed ; Benson describes them by no means from the onlooker's point of view only, but with their own quaint narrowed vision, almost more successfully, in fact, than in the case of many of his human but quite external portraits ; and in fact he deliberately

<sup>1</sup> This anecdote has every mark of the authentic. Benson's use of the adjective *square* is worth a quite special attention. There were *square hymns*, *square words*, and so on. In the cat it suggested a sort of slightly absurd *bonhomie*.

declared, once, that he must be "hard," because the pains of animals affected him so much more than those of men and women, though here and always his affections were never weak or sentimental. Yet they were keen, and had a flash at times, though no more, of wistfulness. In 1913 his horse Peter had to be shot; his dog Jack, whom Reeman had given him, to replace Kim, who also, probably, was shot, had to be poisoned. "I think I am not meant," he wrote to Miss A. E. Nelson, "to love animals too much." He could not, you may remember, believe that Swedenborg did not believe in their immortality. For the sake of explicitness I may here insert a letter addressed to a friend who was anxious about their destiny :

. . . The question of animals' immortality is not an easy one. The fact is that *God has made no revelation on it*; therefore, whatever we may believe, we cannot base it upon absolute certitude. Further we *know*, by the teaching of the Church, that animals have not "rational souls" in the technical sense, and cannot see God. . . .

But all this does not conflict in the least with a belief (which we may certainly hold, and which I emphatically hold) that animals (or at any rate those that have developed their nature in a moral direction at least) have a life after death proportioned to their faculties here. If that is so, there is no shadow of reason why we should not meet our dear dogs and horses again. . . . And, personally, I look forward to that.

But I think the *safe* thing to say—since we are quite certain of that—is that God is infinitely loving and just; and therefore that animals too will be treated lovingly. After all, we *do* know, on the highest Authority, that "not a sparrow falls . . . without our Heavenly Father . . ."

So it is sure to be ALL RIGHT.

Tea was early, out of doors when possible; Benson then disappeared again till eight, and at dinner showed himself the most charming of hosts. This he always was, being at his ease in Hare Street, and not *distrail* and excited

as he often was in London, and always, you may say, in Rome ; nor ever downright flustered and resentful, as when you saw him, in crowded drawing-rooms, surrounded by hatted heads, answering questions about mystical self-realisation, to the tinkle of teaspoons. He preferred always to be alone, and the better he knew his guests, the more would he leave them to themselves. "Come and stay by all means," he would say to one close associate. "I like having you. You fit in. Only don't expect to see much of me." "You fit in," was perhaps his highest compliment. He was extremely undemonstrative, and to the end there were only five or six people whom he addressed by their Christian names. Of course he was claimed by crowds as their especial friend and confidant ; confidant he never was to anybody ; friend, to very many ; but of this topic I will say more below. Therefore at Hare Street you received, on the one hand, none of that terrible hospitality which exacts that your host should do something interesting with you in each part of every day ; but, on the other, when he did appear, the whole atmosphere became as electrically gay as it had hitherto been peaceful and pacifying, and the alternate serenity and stimulus of Hare Street proved the best rest-cure and tonic for many wearied souls. Even when the guest came new to the place, he was made, in a moment, to feel at home. The house was full of absurd and domestic jests, which look pointless on paper, but which anyone will recognise as of the essence of a real home life. For some reason, *brown* and *green* were always to be pronounced *browd* and *greed*. The booming speech of a noted ecclesiastic was delightedly imitated, and the "Trumpington Road" took long to speak of, when each syllable had to be mouthed and mumbled, and Birmingham was never anything but Birminger-Hamber. Whole meals,

too, would be accompanied by the speech of such as "pronounce all their vowels the same," or the donnish drawl of "Ahxfard," or the nasal yet staccato dialect of Mayfair. All these childishnesses would make Benson helpless with laughter; he laughed even more wholeheartedly at his own Limericks, which were quite extraordinarily good or bad, according to your point of view; and never once in his life did the fantastic enjoyment flag derived by him from the rhyme which relates the disaster which so repeatedly befell that Spanish traveller in the train.<sup>1</sup>

But it was at his Christmas parties that his hospitality triumphed. The first was given in 1912 to the children of the parish, and this was practically the only time he came into contact with the local people; he knew nothing of the country round, and went out so little that the parish priest, with whom Father Benson was sometimes seen, was often asked "who his companion was." Of course there was a huge tea, and a St. Nicholas or Father Christmas, who, acted by Dr. Sessions or another friend, appeared suddenly from nowhere. Hugh loved these mystifications, and even on the Christmas Day of 1912, when he was so ill, and was to be operated on in but a few days, "he worked at that party," Father Watt writes to me, "in a way that made one hot to watch." He always gave presents, carefully chosen, to the whole household and to a great circle of friends; and of course he received an immense quantity himself. Father Watt writes again:

. . . I'm afraid he hardly appreciated most of them. I remember once calling his attention to something really valu-

<sup>1</sup> I am allowed to add one last example. He never could recover from the fact that Father Watt came from Ware. He mentioned this to everyone to whom he introduced that priest, the last person being King Manoel of Portugal, a *à bazar*.

able which was getting rather knocked about. "Shouldn't get any presents—spoiled—don't appreciate them," was all he said, and took the thing and put it away in a cupboard. But if he didn't always appreciate valuables, he could show considerable delight over small things of no consequence. One Christmas I gave him half a dozen pairs of stockings—he needed some, and wouldn't buy them; he was always careless about clothes. He was saying Midnight Mass, and I was preaching. After my sermon I went upstairs and hung all the stockings round his bed, a little four-poster he had made for himself. About two hours later I was awakened by him rushing into my room. "Father Watt, Father Watt—what a splendid present! See, I've got them on."<sup>1</sup>

Yet of these Christmas festivals, I feel sure that it will be the Midnight Mass, in the fragrant chapel, with its population of saints and angels making huge shadows on the plaster and the wood, and the poignant melodies of the *Adeste*, which best will remain in the minds of those who passed those days at Hare Street.

And, in much the same manner, what his guests remember, I fancy, best of all will be the time when, the bell for night prayers having rung, he and they would leave the library, if that was where they had been reading his last story, or Miss Lyall's cottage, and would pass through the dusky cloister into the chapel. A great candle stood on the floor beside Hugh's stall, enough of light for him to read by, and to set the rats scurrying, and the birds stirring in the rafters, and to glint upon the gilded Passion emblems of the altar, and the five crimson jewels and the silver door of the Tabernacle. He read the prayers with

<sup>1</sup> For all his "detachment," he was charmingly jealous about these tiny things. A friend of his sent one of his guests a pair of gloves. "Very nice," said Father Benson gruffly. Then, having examined his post: "She hasn't sent me anything." But a second post arrived. "Show me your gloves," he cried, rushing into his guest's room. "Ah," cried he, waving his own delightedly, "mine are much better!" Now in anything that *mattered* in the slightest degree, jealousy or ungenerosity are precisely what never could be dreamt of in connection with Hugh Benson.

extraordinary rapidity and intensity, and silence followed. The faint smell of earth, of wood, of burning wax, and incense associated itself to that dark, warm, tense-strung silence, and became for these few persons the very robe in which Prayer henceforth should present herself to them, when they should seek her company.

Thus, then, have I, following in the wake of many another, tried to betray in some sort the intimacies of the place he meant to be his refuge. If I have omitted from this picture the very details, probably, which gave to Hugh's home, in the memories of his nearer friends, its special dearness—or worse, perhaps, if I have included them—I ask them, and him, to forgive me this, and much more besides.

## II

While actually living at Hare Street, he, as I have said, rarely went beyond the limits of his own garden. FERRETING is down in capitals once, in his engagement-book, and he made a few shooting expeditions. He hated an "off" day, and got worse if he started badly ; if well, he improved and made endless jokes. He would, too, make flying visits to Mr. A. C. Benson at Cambridge, "tear the heart out of a book," and return. He bought in 1911 two pieces of land, one on the road to Barkway, about 150 yards from his house, containing a gravel pit which supplied him with whatever gravel he needed for his paths ; the other, on the way to Buntingford, about 200 yards up the lane from Hare Street. In Buntingford itself he was keenly interested in the building of the Church of St. Richard of Chichester, of which the foundation-stone was laid by the Bishop of Cambysopolis on May 16, 1914. He preached on that occasion, and the sanctuary, nave, and sacristy were soon



HARE STREET CHAPEL: INTERIOR

*From a drawing by Gabriel J. Piffet*





built in good Hertfordshire style. Mass was said there on January 21, 1915, and Father Bernard Vaughan preached, as Mgr. Benson had requested, at the formal opening on Easter Tuesday. It was as priest for the district that Father R. J. J. Watt came to stay with Mgr. Benson in 1912, till such time as a magnificent barn at Little Hornead should be turned, by Lady Gifford, who owned it, into a church. This has been most successfully done, and the Rev. A. N. Morgan now resides there and looks after both the Missions. Father Benson had lent the Buntingford Church £400 at 4 per cent. till at his death it should become a gift. This happened so terribly soon that he never received any of the interest. It would be idle, however, to detail the financial history of this church; for many, the most valuable offerings are those small gifts which local Catholics with so much generosity contributed, or the united labour of such friends as was Miss Mary Samuel Daniel, whose poems, in which Mgr. Benson took such interest, still shine in the votive candlestick; or of Miss Florence Langmore, whose little books upon devotion to the Holy Ghost, spoken of below, were sold by her and Mrs. Paxton for the rising church. I have thought that Mgr. Benson would like these names to be mentioned on this page; but I repeat, to catalogue the gifts of friends were tedious, and indeed impossible.

From Hare Street, however, as he had proposed, he "issued forth" to preach the Gospel, and was rarely there as much as three days in any week. It is even less necessary than before to linger over records of particular excursions, for his engagement-books now give the impression, not of a growing and altering career, but of a kind of established cycle of occupations untiringly repeating itself. Retreats given are still very few, but his

courses of sermons augment in number : "Some Needs of the Soul" and "Some Present-Day Dangers" are new topics noted in his calendars. It is now that the names of his favourite churches, mentioned in a later chapter, quite definitely emerge. His lectures, too, were on much the same subjects as before : "The Future of Religion in England," the "Confessions," "Spiritism," "Points of View," are still at first his favourites ; afterwards, "Lourdes" and the "Modern Novel" are added to the general list ; incidental lectures on "The Preparation of Catholics for the Universities" (given at Old Hall in July, 1914—his interest in the Catholic students at the London University was marked and active), or on "Mountaineering," for the boys of St. John's School, Ealing, appear ;<sup>1</sup> but the real change seems to be, first, the increased number of small societies for which, or clubs at which, he gives his lectures, and the singular requests—such as to report a football match, the Cup Tie Final, at the Crystal Palace, in 1913—which he accepted.

"Dearest Man," his mother will write, "so glad of yours—and to know that I have a SON who is Catholic 'censor' on the editorial board of the *Christian Commonwealth*—LOR !"

It was his deliberate opinion that as a representative of the Catholic Church, he ought to be everywhere. Explicitly, he said he courted advertisement and publicity, and plainly rebuked a friend who expressed his preference for retirement.

For the first time, moreover, since his year at Rome, he is to be found, officially, outside the coasts of England.

Between his departure from Cambridge and actually

<sup>1</sup> His interest in schools and school magazines was always keen, as he assured the Rev. A. Reardon, when felicitating him on his editorship of the *Lisbonian*.

taking up residence at Hare Street, he made a pilgrimage to Lourdes with Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy Storer. He was met by them in Boulogne, and motored to Versailles, which amazed him. "The gardens are simply beyond everything. It seems to be possible to say deliberately that it is the most wonderful human thing I have ever seen—the size, the perfection, the beauty! . . . the place is *crammed* with apparitions." One, I believe, of his entourage saw, or rather heard, the ghostly music incidental to one of these at the Trianon. But it is perfectly impossible to relate all the ghost stories that are draped about Hugh Benson's progress through a materialistic world. He visited Chartres, significant with so many memories of *La Cathédrale*. He reached Lourdes during the last part of August, and was present at the *Pèlerinage National* of which Zola has written at once dishonestly (as Father Benson does not hesitate to declare) and unforgettably. His *Lourdes* is still the best photograph of that extraordinary phenomenon. At the same time, anyone who has assisted at it will easily perceive that whatever at Lourdes was worth capturing, Zola allowed to escape him. Every here and there, however, in Fr. Benson's papers upon that shrine<sup>1</sup> reminiscences of Zola are unmistakable; also, need I say, of Huysmans, though Benson has kept a better hold upon his caustic spirit. Yet his clear eye was still able, for all his fervour, to observe its material and artistic flaws, such as the architecture of its churches, anæmic and dropsical respectively, its ugly statue, and the jarring human machinery set stirring by the divine spark lit up by Mary's advent. On the whole, he spent the day soberly enough in the society of the doctors who examined the cures submitted

<sup>1</sup> They appeared first in the American *Ave Maria*, and were then bound together and published as No. 12 of the *Catholic Library*, a series of volumes edited by Father A. Goodier, S.J.

to them. He arrived armed with a letter of introduction from an important Bishop, who described him as one of the most distinguished ecclesiastics of the United States, especially devoted to the students at one of the great Universities of America.

Mrs. Bellamy Storer has written to me :

I spent the days with him at Dr. Boissarie's *Bureau de Constatations*—because he wanted me to interpret for him what was said—and took notes. The night of the torchlight procession (I can see him still!) he rushed away from me, waving his torch, to join the ranks ; and I spent nearly a day afterwards taking grease-spots from his cassock.

The fact remains that Hugh Benson went to Lourdes, not, indeed, a sceptic, but offering a somewhat academic approbation to the proposition that it was “easier to explain Lourdes by the supernatural hypothesis than by any other.” In his heart he did not like the idea of invoking spiritual forces to cure physical sickness. After his visit, this whole attitude was changed. To begin with, he gave now no mere “notional” assent to the claim that miracles happened there and could be recognised as such. He was passionately convinced that Lourdes was impregnated with the almost perceptible presence of Our Lady ; and that miracles blossomed beneath her touch, both in the chill piscina and at the passing of the afternoon procession ; and that all men need no more than to see, in order to believe. For years he discussed the possibility of heading an Anglican pilgrimage to Lourdes, and he considered with great favour the invitation of Canon Eckert of Lourdes that he should read, as representative of Lourdes at the Eucharistic Congress in Malta, in 1913, a paper on the shrine, the Eucharist, and the Miracles.

Besides this, he came to look at Lourdes as spiritually

too, and even philosophically and scientifically, of supreme importance in the Church. By it, science should be taught to know its place. Then, though not till then, experimental science and thought might hope for reconciliation; hitherto, each had defied the other's frontier, or had at least been doubtful about its own. Finally, Lourdes showed beyond all modern phenomena the sacramental character of the Church, and the incarnational consistency of its spiritual scheme. With remorseless logic, the Indwelling Spirit would prove its presence and power by the restoration to its peculiar perfection even of the flesh. Once more, the Christian is body and soul. Each must share in Christ's full salvation.

It was in February, 1909, that he first went to Ireland, and there lectured on "The Confessions of a Convert." He was back there at the end of July, to speak on "The Future of Religion in the British Isles." In the January of 1910 his note-books assign him once more to Dublin, Cork, and Waterford, speaking on Spiritualism, Lourdes, and his Confessions; and in November he visited Galway and Limerick, and in April, 1913, he paid an exceptionally happy visit to Dublin, lecturing again on Lourdes, Spiritism, and the Missionary Spirit to the students of All Hallows College, Dublin, founded in 1842 for the apostolate of emigrants. He arrived there after the customary rush. On Saturday he watched the victory of Aston Villa at the Crystal Palace for the English Cup Tie Final, and wrote a report for the *Daily Mail*. He preached in London on Sunday, and lectured on the next two nights at the Mansion House in Dublin. He emphatically declared on this occasion what he so often repeated elsewhere—that he felt more at home in Ireland than in England. Wherever the spirit of faith was strong, he felt himself expanding; that was the atmos-

phere he could breathe ; and he was most sincere when he declared that however much he might cling to traditional political beliefs, or cherish certain prejudices about individuals, classes, or theories, the essentially Irish spirit was to him like oxygen for the soul.

"Don't mind what they say," he wrote to Miss Beatrice Gardiner ; "go to Ireland and see for yourself. It does me more good than any country in the world. The air throbs with grace and faith. That's why the Briton doesn't like it. The rest is LIES. Don't bother at all about it.

On October 16, 1913, he wrote to Mr. A. C. Benson from Edinburgh :

I preached here on Sunday ; travelled all Monday night, and in so rough a sea from Ardrossan to Belfast that the screw was chiefly in the air ; slept most of Tuesday ; preached at 11 and 4 on Wednesday to 4000 people ; travelled back all night again ; arrived here 10 A.M. ; have to preach to-night.

To-morrow I propose to lie down and die. Oh ! my poor horse has to be shot ! It is a tragedy. He kept on injuring his leg. I don't know what to do. It is all over now.

I do not know that he visited Ireland any more after this.

In 1909, 1911, and 1913, he preached the Lents at San Silvestro in Rome, and was booked to do so again in 1915.

Frankly, he disliked these Lents in Rome. He detested the Anglo-Roman clique as a clique, though it was full, for him, of friends. He is as savage in his criticism of it as of any social grouping he dislikes. Besides, he was at a strain there, and cold usually, and often hungry. He missed his English breakfast.

"How do you manage about breakfast ?" he asked a friend who was in Rome one Lent.

"I always have an egg."

"Oh! do you get an egg?" he said quite wistfully; though, of course, he could have had a dozen had he but asked for them, for he had the kindest of hosts.

But he *asked* for comforts scarcely at all. A *scaldino* scarcely replaced an English fire, and he often had not even that. In consequence, he, being cold, could not think: the composition of his sermons became a misery; he regarded this, however, as a direct expression of God's will, like missing a train, and asked for no remedy.

At the same time he got a good deal of pleasure out of his stay there; and Mr. Robert Hichens, who met him there, writes to me that:

I have never seen anyone more happy in a belief than he was in his. He seemed to me a quite exceptionally happy man. I fear I was led away into the sin of envy.

That is a great tribute, and perhaps the more valuable because Mr. Hichens did not fail to observe Hugh's *fierceness* rather than serenity of faith. Yet, for all that, there was not a moment's *cruelty* of faith, if such be possible. Hugh talked hotly about the wickedness of exacting more from men than they *can* believe, and the misery of those who try to persuade themselves that they believe what they do not. Mr. Hichens remained most of all impressed, perhaps, by Hugh's refusal to *condemn*.

I told him that I admired the great Russian writers more than the writers of any other country, and that I thought Tolstoy the truest delineator of men and women who has ever lived. I remember that in speaking of Tolstoy, who has so fiercely attacked the Churches, Father Hugh did not condemn him; evidently he recognised that Tolstoy was thoroughly sincere. We discussed death, and I remember saying that I had often spoken of death with Arabs, and that I had never met any Arab who seemed to fear death. This interested him, and led to a discussion about fear. I said that I had often met thoroughly

believing Christians who were evidently terrified at the thought of death, and that I thought this strange, as it seemed to me that love, which they professed towards God, ought to give them confidence in God. He agreed with me, but said he thought many believers feared death because they felt themselves to be so unworthy and so unfit to die. I told him that the Arab seems free from any feeling of that kind. We then spoke of the desert, and I said it swept out fear from a man. I remember quoting to him Balzac's saying: "The desert is God without man." He said that was a noble summing up of the inner meaning of solitude.

Not that even now his temper was dulled into universal acquiescence. Lady Catherine Ashburnham writes to me that in this same year, 1909, in Rome :

He was hot-tempered ; for example, we had literally to hold him down by the coat-tails, because he wanted to thrash a boy who had chucked stones at us motoring in the mountains near Subiaco—we feared, with just cause, that he would get knifed for his pains ! He was also highly imaginative. On that same tour we were nearly hurled over a precipice by the reckless driving of our chauffeur. Mgr. Benson, who was by his side, decided that in the event, he could escape—possibly with a broken leg—by shooting himself straight out to the side, whereas we must be killed ! It was unnecessary in the event—but that same night there was a bump above our heads from his room, and we learnt next morning that he had re-enacted the whole performance in his sleep, and only woke to find himself shivering on the stone floor of his room, not a sheet ruffled—he had shot clean out of bed ! (he told me he used often to pick himself up in the fender when he was younger)—and was congratulating himself on escaping with a broken leg while we were all dead !

It is rather comical to re-read, in Hugh Benson's earlier letters, sentences in which he exclaims against the whole idea of travel. And, once away, all his prayer was to get home again. And when it was first suggested to him that



he should go to preach in America, he uttered loud cries of horror.

Still, the notion of America and a reinvigorated Catholicism had been closely associated in his mind ever since, in Rome, anything had seemed better to him than to vegetate, as he feared he would be forced to do, in England. But the first formation of his belief that America had a great work to do on behalf of the human coefficient in modern Catholicism was because he saw no other way of introducing an Anglo-Saxon spirit into what, he thought, was still too Latinised. The whole question of *racial* psychology had been opened up for him by a criticism of Mr. F. F. Urquhart's, of Balliol, upon the *national* psychology of Tudor Englishmen as depicted by Benson in his historical novels.

"I liked your book," he wrote, "very much, of course, but it set me wondering whether we can really think of these sixteenth-century people, as you do—as so very like us—whether we can really understand them and look into them, as you do. I sometimes think they were more unlike us, more mysterious, more like Japs, perhaps, or any strange people you choose to think of. . . . It was very moving to hear a number of Japanese women singing the Credo in church yesterday. I have sometimes dreamt that this people might help to disentangle Christianity from Europeanism. Don't you think it would be a great work? I don't see how Christianity can really spread in the East till this has happened. . . ."

Benson agreed that the Elizabethans had no nerves, in the modern sense. It is very odd. Do you know Machyn's diary? Of course you do. There, apparently, a group going to be hanged causes no more tremor than an ox going to a slaughter-house. . . .

I can't conceive anything I should loathe more than to go round the world. But I suppose I must congratulate you, and say that I am sure it must be delightful.—Yours ever, in the most *terrible* hurry.

I never can imagine Japan except as a comic opera stage, but I suppose it is more than that. I suppose that it is broadening to go there ; but more and more I don't want to be broadened, but narrowed. . . . I envy people who can be broadened without losing by it.

No ; I am not sure that I do agree about sixteenth-century people. It seems to me that human beings are more united by being human than disunited by being individuals of various centuries. Certainly one is always largely wrong in thinking one understands them ; but don't you think one has to go on, labelling and classifying, and being, at the same time, perfectly ready to re-label and withdraw to any extent, yet also, at the same time, always assuming in doubt that they are like and not unlike ourselves ? But I don't know. . . .

I agree *hugely* about Japan de-Europeanising Christianity. But a step towards that seems to me first to Anglo-Saxonise Christianity. The Latins are just like their architecture—bringing the curves of heaven down to earth ; but it seems to me that we want a great deal more of the aspiring Goths as well. I wonder whether this will not come through America ; whether the Church is not moving westward in its spirit, and will ultimately make a complete circle round to the East again. I have been seeing a lot of Americans lately, and they all seem to have that kind of fervour which means aiding and not hindering life ; they bang about and get hot and red on the side of the Church.

And to Miss H. Anderson, in whose house at Oxford he lectured more than once, he wrote, almost in the same words :

It does seem to me that your work of helping people to know one another is most excellent. I wonder so much sometimes whether it may not be God's intention to restore the Anglo-Saxon element to the Church, which she lost in the sixteenth century, through America.

I am not sure whether England is not too much saturated with historical movements to give back a clear energetic contribution to the Church. Even "Americanismus" seems a symptom of great energy. And on all sides one hears of the

extraordinary progress in America towards Catholic truth. I wonder whether the promise will be fulfilled, and whether we shall see an American Pope in another hundred years. . . .

It seems to me that the contribution that England has to make towards the social atmosphere must lie more in a sort of restfulness. Both have their place, just as a boy and a middle-aged man have each their function.

Americans, on their side, were assuring Benson of a special welcome awaiting him ; one wrote to him in January, 1906 :

To Americans in general, so densely unconscious of a certain spiritual atmosphere, and yet so ready to expand in it if their higher nature receives the revelation, it will be, I believe, of endless value. The Abbé Klein, *Au Pays de la Vie Intense*, is almost the only one who has recognised these conflicting moral attitudes in us. Deliberately religious books, lives of the Saints, and contemplative studies do not affect us ; but your men and women [that is, the characters in his novels] are of flesh and blood—their virtues, honour, loyalty, rectitude, and superb courage, and with a superb patience their ideal endurance, yet not too fine for daily living.

Father Benson visited America first in 1910, and sailed home on the *Adriatic* in May. He disembarked at 2 A.M. at Plymouth. Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy Storer had sailed by the same boat ; and as he disembarked, Mrs. Storer, whose affection for his sermons was greater than any she could entertain towards his novels, implored him to remember that Pentecost was a *Voice*. . . . “ It begins with PEN, all the same,” he triumphantly retorted, and escaped.

To Mrs. Storer he wrote an enthusiastic letter of gratitude for the welcome she had extended to him during his stay there :

HARE STREET.  
May 13.

MY DEAR MRS. STORER,—This letter is an attempt to thank you and Mr. Storer more properly for all your kind-

ness than was possible in the library of a steamer. I really am amazed with gratitude, so to speak, as I see what a trouble I must have been. But I did enjoy myself hugely, and—well, I am very grateful, and want to say so. I hope the rest of your journey was as prosperous as mine. I came on here, as I got a wire from my mother, telling me that the boiler or something had burst, and that she was at Lambeth Palace. I am going to see her there on Sunday. So I got no Jacoby, alas! I do hope we may all meet in London again this summer, and that the dog may be there too! (mine has never come back). . . . And, meanwhile, please believe how grateful I am to yourself and Mr. Storer, and, if it is not impertinent, give him my love.—Yours ever sincerely,  
R. HUGH BENSON.

I should have been sorry to omit this tribute to a friendship which he observed, with active loyalty, through many years, and in more ways than one.

It remains that this first visit to America was relatively tentative. He had foreseen working as hard “as two lectures and sermons in the week and one on Sundays.” He delivered, in a beautiful private house at Boston, the lectures which afterwards appeared as *Christ in the Church*. I cannot, however, find from letters to or from him what were his experiences during these few weeks. Only one allusion of interest I have found in his engagement-book. After a sketch of the Flat Iron Building comes one of an opium pipe, and a note, “Small  $\frac{1}{2}$ -lb tin, \$35; \$75 a lb.” Then this entry, as far as I can decipher it:

May 3.—We went to China Town 8.30–10.30 P.M. Two detectives—Chinese actor—two white girls Loo-loo “father”—beautifully clean. Does not make them sleep—no dreams—“nothing about money”—“just ordinary dreams—falling down—jumping into river—being murdered.” Takes two or three minutes to “burn poison out”—thirty seconds to smoke. Very gentle and serene, and brighten up after each pipe.

Since, however, his general experiences cannot have been very different in kind from those of two years later, I will confine myself to the latter.

On his second visit, therefore, Mgr. Benson arrived on board the *Carmania*, in New York, on Sunday afternoon, February 18, 1912. He was met by the kindly greeting of Father J. P. Sheridan, of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, and, if not at once, in a very short time by the expected crowd of newspaper reporters. In the *New York Herald* of February 19 I find his portrait, in which he appears with arched black eyebrows, a delicately modelled mouth, and a long, very smooth face. He refused, we hear, to speak of religion, but "voluntarily launched into a bitter denunciation of Socialism, and,

asked for his opinion of George Bernard Shaw, he broke into a laugh.

"See here," he said, "no one takes Mr. Shaw seriously. It would be an injustice to him, I think. He is amusing, yes, and pretty much of a joke."

Soon enough, however, his compelling personality was to get itself reproduced with some modicum of verisimilitude.

His sermons were those afterwards reprinted in book shape, under the titles *The Friendship of Christ* and *The Paradoxes of Christianity*, of which the latter, at any rate, were an already much worked lode. They were delivered on Wednesdays and Fridays and twice on Sundays. His introductory sermon, on Ash Wednesday, February 21, was, however, upon the text, "By what authority do you these things, and who gave you that authority?" The welcome they received was enthusiastic.

"Indeed," he cries, "this life is wonderful. In England we have simply no idea of what the Catholic Church is

here, in the most progressive city in the world. It is the one and only religious force worth considering. I am in the smallest parish in the city—only 3000 Catholics! There have to be eight Masses each Sunday, all crammed. Nearly every church here, including this one, has to be built in two stories, with altar above and below, in order to accommodate the vast congregation.

And again :

Wonderful experiences over here. Englishmen don't seem to have the faintest idea of the influence of the Church here. Here is the smallest parish in New York—eight Masses each Sunday, and all packed. Each priest has to duplicate, or the people would not be able to get into church to hear Mass!

It is all so prosperous that one almost fears!

Please continue to pray well for me. I'm not very well; and it's an endless tug on one's nervous system.

Besides the sermons, the lectures and the speeches soon began. On March 7 he was attending a lecture by Dr. Walsh (the President of the Fordham Medical School) upon *The Spiritual World and Spirits* when he was espied in the audience. Invited on to the platform, he threw, with the most perfect grace imaginable, a bomb into the lecture-room, by contradicting flatly in every particular, the thesis advanced by Dr. Walsh, which claimed that electric light had banished ghosts. Everyone was charmed; but, pathetically enough, on his descent from the platform nerves asserted themselves, and he could scarcely speak a word to the flocking ladies.

On March 11 he left, with Father J. MacMahon, Rector of Our Lady of Lourdes, for Washington, and lectured on Protestantism, and again, a week later, on Catholicism. While there he called on President Taft, whom he found "charming and genial," and, "dignified" he allows, "but democratic." He met, too, Chief Justice White, a Catholic,

and assiduous at his lectures, and he attended the opening session of the Supreme Court. These lectures were repeated at New York in the grand ball-room of the Hotel Astor, and were marked by great optimism of outlook, so that they seemed almost a distant preface to *The Dawn of All*. The revival of Protestantism in England, he urged, had led the English people back to a recognition of some profound relation between the human soul and God, which was personal religion, and of justification by faith and works. Thus a door was being opened for the return of Catholicism, to which social study and even science were beginning to show themselves favourable.

After this a pious society entertained him at a "beef-steak supper," and presented him with a gold watch. To Miss M. Armstrong he wrote :

NEW YORK.

March, 1912.

Things going tearingly here, if only I could sleep a little more. It's really not good enough to sleep uneasily through nightmare after nightmare—all about dead people and their corpses—for five hours ; and then to lunch out, and tea out, and to lecture or preach six times a week. I fainted wholly and entirely on my way over here, and have no idea even how long I was unconscious—and all without any premonitory symptoms. I just found myself emerging from eternity on to the floor of my cabin. I wonder if death's like that. I hope so. . . . But I'm apparently and rapidly making my future. . . . I'm lecturing in the ball-room of the Astor Hotel twice ; tickets from one dollar to three and about 2000-2500 people in the audience !! And this, if you please, is an EXTRA. . . . And I dine with millionaires, and ladies with \$2000 worth of jewellery on—Miss Fortescue, in fact !<sup>1</sup>

So you must pray for me that I may not come back

<sup>1</sup> "Miss Fortescue" was a standing theme for merriment, and came from a nonsense rhyme made up by a friend of his. She stood for the sum of all perfection. "But *have* you seen Miss Fortescue?" they would inquire from one another when anyone was extravagantly praised.

bloated and arrogant. I have also grasped the hand of the President and the Chief Justice, and am to dine with a railroad king next week.

So you must pray, or I shall be wearing a fur coat !

On Good Friday he preached at the Three Hours' Service, and again, in the evening, three sermons on *Maria Desolata* ; and at a reception held in his honour on Easter Sunday evening he was presented with a set of red vestments and a gold cigarette-case. The glee with which he welcomed the golden shower, soon to fall so steadily, was indescribable ; he giggled over his takings for the rest of his life.

On Tuesday, April 9, he delivered a final speech at the Hudson Theatre, on "Modern Psychical Research," and left that evening for Detroit. (He had given the same lecture the night before to the Twentieth Century Club in Brooklyn.)

A correspondent writes of this most characteristic journey :

I captured Mgr. Benson on the stage, and hurried him over to the Grand Central in ample time for our train leaving at 12.40. We hastily ate a sandwich, and took a cup of coffee just before reaching Highbridge. I had secured a permit allowing him to ride on the engine, and so at Highbridge, where the steam locomotive takes the place of the electric motor, he climbed into the huge machine and had the most enjoyable (? ?) ride of his life all the way to Albany, flying along for stretches at the rate of sixty miles an hour. When I got him out of the cab at Albany, his own mother would have doubted his identity, as he was quite sooty round the eyes and on the side turned to the air. . . . In the morning we go on to Detroit, reaching there at 1.30 P.M. He lectures in the evening, and we take the train back at midnight, spending all Thursday at the Falls (Niagara) and reaching N.Y. on Friday at 6 P.M. in time for dinner.



His mother wrote, when at length he found time to give her a true history of his doings :

Now I feel that I do know something about you, and that is rather more than I like with regard to engagements. LOR !

Are they immortal out there ?—having to live without resting, and talk without thinking, preaching without a moment to pray in ; and again I say, LOR !

The rest came soon, however, when he sailed for home on the *Olympic*, on April 13, and on the great ship he found time for the prayer for which his activities, for a while, provided a substitute not disallowed by his Master.

His cabin he found so crammed with presents of all sorts that he was enormously pleased to compare himself to a popular actress, returning laden with booty from the States. Yet grim elements were not lacking to this journey. At a certain moment the *Olympic's* course was deflected. She raced over a track not her own, in answer to a cry from the *Titanic*, which was foundering.

Hugh Benson said that what had struck him most forcibly during this visit was the noise, and then the size, and then the good temper in spite of it. The wonderful light-heartedness, and the gaiety, and the “extraordinary kindness and humanity” of America were, he insisted, unlooked-for revelations to an Englishman. The latter he found best exemplified in the admirable régime observed by the great Sing-Sing Prison of New York, which he visited. Of the former, he himself, I suppose, provided an example, when he insisted on being strapped into the electrocution chair.

It was in the August after this expedition that he spent his holiday with Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy Storer at the Riffel Alp. He was thoroughly overhauled before starting, because,

Mrs. Storer tells me, "he said he would not come at all if I would not let him climb. He wished to outdo what his brother had done eighteen years before."

I hired a very sure guide to take care of him. His heart was pronounced absolutely sound, and he went everywhere, only omitting the Matterhorn, and that because of bad weather just before he had to leave. I never shall forget how like a boy he looked in his Alpine costume, with a coil of rope and a pickaxe, and he had all a boy's enthusiasm. He seemed in *perfect* health at that time, and the only *contretemps* was that he chilled his face climbing on a glacier a few days before he went away, and started an inflammation at the root of a tooth, which caused a swelling, at which he laughed in spite of the pain, because it made him seem a caricature of Mgr. Benson !

The friends played Jacoby, his favourite card game, every night, and daily he said his Mass in the old Catholic church near which, he pointed out with diurnal content, the tourists' chapel showed a malapert tin roof, "like a biscuit-box," he said.

"Just back last night from Switzerland," he wrote to Miss A. Essington Nelson ; "the best holiday we ever had. But the weather was vile. No one did *any* first-class peak at Zermatt, and I had to content myself with second-class ones—a glacier and rocks generally. I climbed one day with the guide, who was in that accident on the Aletsch ten days before, and who arrived at the hotel blind, and on all fours!! It was a glorious time. . . ."

And to another friend :

*September 11, 1912.*

Here am I at Cannes, making a private retreat with immense graces and consolations. I haven't been so happy for years. [ . . . ] Switzerland was lovely. The biggest peaks were closed ; but I did some others, with plenty of glaciers and rocks . . . and my heart was in my mouth twenty times at least, with acts of contrition and *In manus Tuas*. . . . But here I am still !

In 1914 Mgr. Benson once more left for New York, by the *Olympic*, which was timed to arrive at latest on Ash Wednesday morning. He was perfectly prepared to deliver his first sermon that night. A rough voyage, during which he felt "all reeling and roaring round" him, delayed his arrival by one day, and he gave a kind of combination sermon on Friday, February 27.

The sermons this time were twenty-four in number, and formed a course upon *The Way, The Truth, and The Life*. In the leaflet distributed beforehand was contained the quite admirable advice that those who proposed following the course should first read certain passages, carefully indicated, in the *Lives* of Christ by Le Camus, Coleridge, and Meschler respectively, upon the texts of the sermons which were also printed in full. In this way the congregation would come to the church with their minds already attuned to the sermon they were going to hear, and unembarrassed by any ignorance as to the occasion or circumstances of those words of Christ of which the preacher was to speak. The following note was also interestingly added to the leaflet :

Mgr. Benson has a distinct style of preaching, differing materially from the traditional method of the Catholic pulpit in this country. The latter is modelled practically upon the French method, with its divisions, sub-divisions, &c. To appreciate the difference of treatment it would be advisable to read Benson's printed sermons.

A list is then added, with the booksellers' name and whereabouts. It was this application of business method to the spiritual life which was for something in the intense and excited satisfaction with which Mgr. Benson could contemplate his own performances in America.

Besides these sermons he was equipped with a series of

five "conferences" on Difficult Points of Catholic Faith and Practice. These were, as a matter of fact, reminiscences of the motor-mission talks, and had for theme: *What is the Good of the Pope? Who can Forgive Sins but God Only? Are there not Bad Catholics? What is the Use of Monks and Nuns?* and *Why I am a Catholic*. This was the "autobiographical lecture" which figures so largely in his engagement-book. It was with the help of Father John MacMahon, Rector of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, that he made his selection. He repeated the last lecture at the Amphion Theatre in Brooklyn in aid of the Church of the Nativity, then being built. Its line of argument was that familiar to readers of the *Confessions*; its style was breezy and colloquial, and it had no features of unusual interest.

By March, however, he was not a little unwell. He could not lecture one evening, nor preach on the next day, Friday. On Wednesday evening, his sermons had appeared utterly to exhaust him. The doctor diagnosed tonsillitis.

"Give me a prayer particularly, please," he writes to England; "I have been ill, with grippe and tonsillitis, and have had to work—with the result that I feel finished. Three discourses yesterday—two to-day, and so on. About sixty in fifty days!—it really is too much."

He left, however, on the Tuesday, for Philadelphia, and gave two lectures there, one, "Confessions of a Convert," and the other, "Modern Dangers to Religion," and, returning, lectured on "Philanthropy," doing so again that afternoon, for an Asylum for the Blind, and yet again that evening in the auditorium of the school of the church where he was preaching. Two other lectures he gave in the Hotel Astor, the second being on Lourdes; and he had the happiness

of finding here his old friend Mr. T. Tertius Noble, once organist of Ely Cathedral, whom he persuaded to preface the lecture by a recital. He supervised a final rehearsal of his *Joan of Arc*, to be given by the Lourdes Dramatic Union, and on the Easter Monday, when the play was acted, himself painted the banner Joan carried.

On Easter Wednesday, accompanied by Fr. MacMahon, he left for Chicago, stopping to lecture at Buffalo.

Travelling by night, swallowing "caviare and whisky" as hasty antidotes to fatigue, the travellers found there, when in the morning they disembarked, a number of photographers and reporters, and into the limousine which Benson entered plunged too a reporter who demanded to know, in a word, what he considered the essential difference between England and America. Benson serenely observed that England was monarchical and America democratic. I find from the reports in such newspapers as have reached me, that astonishment was felt because Mgr. Benson, the vividness of whose personality escaped nobody, did so little deliberately to advertise it. He *let* his light shine. "The only self-revelatory sentence," one journal regretfully confesses, "which Mgr. Benson permitted himself, was this: 'I was invited a short time ago to meet the writer and Socialist, Mr. H. G. Wells, at Cambridge. As I have a habit of forgetting the time and place of my engagements, I entered the wrong house at the wrong hour!'"

I may add that this confession, which provoked a merited smile, had its pathos. It was a real mark of the coming collapse. Everybody noticed towards the end the increasing frequency of these forgotten appointments. They hurt Hugh Benson himself acutely. He felt he had sinned gravely against that exactness of obedience which all

engagements claim. However, in the six months which remained the symptom was recurrent.

Apparently the travellers were instantly escorted to a Chinese restaurant, and partook of a complete Chinese luncheon, and at this Professor Starr, the well-known anthropologist of Chicago University, was another guest. Benson took the keenest interest in what he had to say about his travels in the Congo and Japan. I believe that little would have been needed to persuade Benson to follow Mr. Urquhart round the world, or, after the next visit to America, planned for 1916, to return home by further westward voyage. As it was, Mgr. Benson followed up his Chinese luncheon with a Turco-Russian bath, and then dined at a club called the Mediaevalists, where he spoke on "The Modern Novel." After this he visited the Knights of Columbus Hall, and was there initiated. Arriving home after midnight, he proceeded to Notre Dame, Indiana, where he lectured at the University, and was back in New York on April 22 to give a farewell lecture at Delmonico's in the afternoon, and another, following a good-bye dinner. He received at this dinner a set of green vestments and other gifts, and scenes of great enthusiasm took place.

During these visits to America he was assiduous in visiting theatres. Especially Mr. Chesterton's *Magic* fascinated him ; he was constantly behind the scenes at its rehearsals. He made a lady of his acquaintance feel, she says, "a little bit of a prig" by the intense interest he displayed in Nazimova's acting version of his friend Mr. Hichens's *Bella Donna*, which she had feared to attend. *Potash and Perlmutter* and *Peg of My Heart* he made a point of seeing, and he was not unknown to condescend even to the music-halls, such as the New York Hippodrome and Circus.

It was his good fortune, too, to hear the famous tenor, Mr. John M'Cormack, who sang for him at a drawing-room concert especially arranged for him.

He sailed for England on St. George's Day, April 23, and on landing hurried straight to Mr. E. W. Hornung's house in London, and announced himself. "What," said Mr. Hornung, "are your plans?" "N-nothing at all," Hugh answered eagerly, "except to go to confession, and have my hair cut."

He, as a matter of fact, plunged headlong into his old routine of rush, finding time to write to an American weekly paper the impressions he had gathered from his visit.

All men, he felt, by a temperamental bias, tend to brood over the past, or strain towards the future. Europe is fascinated by its past—even Catholics tend to rest on their achievements, not to imitate them. America is all for the future, "crammed" though she be "with history." He could not conceive any man being in doubt as to the future of Catholicism in America. The congregations, the zeal, the activities, the business-like methods, in all this America was incomparably ahead of Europe. Ecclesiastical life

inspires the visitor from Europe with an extraordinary sense of life : the churches are not exquisite sanctuaries for dreaming—they are the business offices of the supernatural ; the clergy are not picturesque advocates of a beautiful mediævalism—they are keen and devoted to the service of God ; the people are not pathetic survivals from the Ages of Faith—they are communities of immortal souls bent upon salvation. There is a ring of assurance about Catholic voices ; an air of confidence about Catholic movements ; a swift, punctual, conscientious, and efficient atmosphere about Catholic activities ; a swing and energy about Catholic life, that promise well indeed for the future of the Church in this land. . . .

Yet he feels that there is a danger. As in politics, legislation and precedent should go hand-in-hand ; in art,

tradition and enterprise; so in religion, activity and contemplation should neither of them oust the other. Is there, Mgr. Benson asks, enough reflection in America? True, he had scarcely given himself the chance of judging . . . ; still, was the proportion of contemplative religious houses as high there as in Europe? Not nearly. Does so high a proportion of the devout spend a yearly week in retreat?<sup>1</sup> In the churches there was not enough of "brooding peace," "not enough darkness." Would not the intelligent, alert piety of the American Catholic "resent" heavy rood-lofts or screens, such as Europe has loved?

In Europe it was easy to be a dreamer. . . . In America he had thought that he found illustrated the parable of the "great net" let down into the seething waters of humanity, and of the Church herself, "terrible as an army with banners."<sup>2</sup>

"Yet," he concluded, "I may still remember that it was He who 'went about doing good' who also invited His disciples to 'come apart and rest awhile.'"

It was just at this time that Hugh announced to a friend: "In the autumn I mean to take a thorough rest."

Such rest as he obtained was found, of course, at Hare Street. And of his time spent there I have given the daily colouring. A very few features, apart from his books, stand out. Here, then, he wrote, besides those of which I speak separately below, *Non-Catholic Denominations* for the Westminster Series; *A Winnowing*, *Oddsfish*, and *Come Rack, Come Rope*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I think Mgr. Benson under-estimated the retreat movement in America.

<sup>2</sup> He also says, of the leaven working in the dough. This illustration is perhaps less happy. One important point of the leaven is the secrecy and silence of its work, and, in a sense, its own disappearance within what it is changing.

<sup>3</sup> In November 1911 he jotted down the *Child's Rule of Life*, when in the train, one Saturday, on the way to Liverpool. He copied it out on the Tuesday, and gave it to Mr. Pippet, who illustrated it in May 1912. Some rather similar children's verses, on the Old Testament, were less successful.



Of these, the first will perhaps not add to his reputation. It is neither very complete nor very accurate, and affords very little opportunity, by means of references or bibliography, for the reader to supplement or correct these defects. Meaning to be charitable, and starting out with the most excellent intentions of looking at the bright and not the unsatisfactory side of the sects he speaks of, he yet is often chilly in his tone, and succeeded in arousing considerable resentment, which he felt to be unfair. Of the slow growth of *Oddsfish* I have spoken already. Full as it is of good dramatic episodes, it remains heavy and lacking in coherence of construction. For certain scenes, and here and there for character-drawing, I feel it to be unsurpassed by anything he wrote; but as a whole he himself continued to disapprove of it, and wanted to throw it, as he did, in fact, throw one earlier draft, bodily into the fire. To the writing of *Come Rack, Come Rope*, he was stimulated almost equally by Dom Bede Camm's account of the Fitzherbert family in *Forgotten Shrines*, by a sermon he preached in 1911 at Padley Chapel in Derbyshire, at the yearly pilgrimage held there, and by the earnest request of Mr. George Lane-Fox, with whom he stayed, in Yorkshire, immediately afterwards. The gallant figures of Queen Mary Stuart and of Edward Campion reappear in its pages; Derby has become a holy and haunted place for many since Hugh Benson's description of the martyrdoms which have taken place in it and around it. There is much history in the book, and much passion, and the repetition of the doctrine of vocation which here leads a girl to drive the lad who loves her to priesthood and to martyrdom. And always the refrain occurs, "It was better so." Far better the rack, the gallows, the disembowelled body, still horribly alive, with the poor soul still cognisant in

its limbs and brain, better the fire and cauldron than the disregarding of one syllable, even, of the imperial call of Christ.

*A Winnowing* is a strange book, narrating the death of a worldly young Catholic squire, his resuscitation, and his consequent conversion. This conversion involves a relentless putting into logical practice of a number of other-worldly principles; he abandons his pipe, his gun, his after-dinner coffee, his horse, his valet, his cricket; he hears Mass after Mass, lodges the chaplain in the Hall, establishes a convent of Poor Clares in the loveliest part of his grounds.<sup>1</sup>

The county is appalled; his wife half driven frantic. Little by little his fervour wanes; her supernatural life, on the contrary, wakes up. He degenerates and dies again; and she becomes a Poor Clare in the convent she once so hated. All the other characters in the book are studies in worldliness, successful in a very clever, hard, external manner. The Dowager Lady Carberry is a type well known by now, dreadful and too much of a subject for sermons.

"Very many thanks for your most kind letter," he wrote to Miss Edith Pearson, who had hazarded an interpretation of his intentions in writing this book; "you have said exactly what I meant to convey by *A Winnowing*. Of course they are small people, blown upon by the biggest forces that there are—Death, Reality, God. . . . And the

<sup>1</sup> In Benson's description of their great treasure, the "incorrupt" corpse of a young sister, defunct in the odour of sanctity, we have a Roman reminiscence. From Rome he wrote on March 4, 1904:

"Mr. — and I went yesterday to the exhuming of the body of Elizabeth Sanna, who died thirty-five years ago in the odour of sanctity. They hoped to find the body incorrupt; but it was not so. . . . It was very interesting to see the actual bones of the Saint, and the Franciscan habit in which she was buried as a tertiary of St. Francis; and to think that very possibly every one of the fragments would be a venerated relic some day."

book is an attempt to show how people are spun round, and some blown away by the Great Winds. If only people wouldn't always be looking out for 'heroes' and 'heroines' who behave correctly, always! Forgive this card, in haste."

In 1911 he definitely obtained the rank of Papal Chamberlain which he had for some time felt to be suitable to the position and activities which were his. Hugh was full of singular contradictions in the matter of social distinctions; yet not so contradictory, after all, perhaps, if you remember his very definite belief in caste and the value of breeding, and if you join to this his artist's and actor's love of the picturesque and dramatically effective. He loved great houses and great names, and appreciated the sonorities of style, and could not have described them half so well had he not loved their strength enough to hate their weaknesses. "Hugh Benson," some one wrote long ago to me, "can never describe a house where there is not a second footman." He loved those details; but you will observe that his observation of the suburban home (as in *An Average Man*) is no less minute; that no one, not even Mr. Galsworthy or Mr. W. B. Maxwell, ever scourged the patrician with a whip of small cords so searching as were his;<sup>1</sup> that the servants who afforded him such endless entertainment always loved him; and that in dealing with personages of real life, away from the transfiguring imagination, no one was ever less of a snob or parasite; finally, that never once did his personal recollections or his Monsignorhood make him anything but utterly courteous, and, in the

<sup>1</sup> A terrible little criticism in his diary, passed upon a very distinguished personage (and, I may add, extraordinarily undeserved), shows at once his fastidiously ruthless application of high standards and his detachment from the *individual* representative of the honoured caste. "X," said he, "is an elegant ecclesiast: and a cad, though he said not several times."

higher plane of religious virtues, anything but humble. And his was the only true humility—that is, unconscious truthfulness.

Information of his new dignity reached him the day after the death of his old nurse Beth. Mr. A. C. Benson has related of her, in *Hugh*, two or three anecdotes which suffice to immortalise her memory.

“When we were all dispersed for a time after my father’s death,” he writes, “Beth went to her Yorkshire relations, and pined away in separation from her dear ones. Hugh returned alone and earlier than the rest, and Beth could bear it no longer, but came up from Yorkshire, just to get a glimpse of Hugh at a station in London as he passed through, had a few words from him and a kiss, and gave him some little presents which she thought he might like, returning to Yorkshire tired out but comforted. . . .

“When he grew older she used to delight to wait on him, to pack and unpack for him, to call him in the mornings and secretly to purchase clothes and toilet articles to replace anything worn out or lost. In later days the thought that he was coming home used to make her radiant for days before. She used to come tapping at my door before dinner, and sit down for a little talk. ‘I know what you are thinking about, Beth!’ ‘What is it, dear?’ ‘Why, about Hugh, of course! You don’t care for anyone else when he is coming.’ ‘No, don’t say that, dear; but I am pleased to think that Master Hugh is coming home for a bit—I hope he won’t be very tired!’”

Hugh sat with her in the evenings in her room full of nursery treasures, lovingly imitated her pet phrases, was followed, as he departed from the house, by her smile and waving hand. When she fell ill, he wrote on all sides asking for prayers that her passing might be without pain. He was summoned to her, was recognised and embraced by her, and spoke of her death and the conditional absolution which he gave her with tears in his eyes. To his

friend Mrs. Paxton, who in the June of the same year had suffered a similar loss, he wrote :

MY DEAR CHILD,—I offer you my deepest sympathy : just a year ago I was in the same sorrow myself, and I know the peculiar pathos of such a loss. But I soon found it easy to think of the welcome that my own nurse would give me when I joined her. I was even able to think of the “mansion” which she would love to help to get ready for our arrival ! Because loving and faithful service is the noblest work that anyone can do, and surely must have an eternal continuance, and, at the same time, I shall think myself lucky if I even get sight of her at all in heaven. I will say the Mass to-morrow morning, and shall make a memento of my own nurse too, as, indeed, I do every day. . . . Perhaps they are friends already.

God bless and console you.—Ever yours sincerely,

HUGH BENSON.

It was some time after this, I think, that he was worried by threats from the militant advocates of women’s suffrage. He wrote right and left to complain. Suffragists insisted upon interviews. They determined to interrupt him at the Carmelite High Mass. He asked for detectives and Irish Guards within and without the Church. He gleefully informed his friends that he was sleeping in his summer-house (he often did this) with a police whistle. The house was watched ; local policemen were on the alert ; the village was excited, and half hoped for an attack.

As for his general view upon this phenomenon, he wrote to one correspondent :

I WILL NOT discuss women’s suffrage with anyone in the world ! It is a matter of profound ideals ; and there is never any good in discussing them ! But I quite recognise the duty of everyone to work for their ideals ; and I claim my own !!!

And to another, that he was far too angry with these ladies to allow himself to write the book which more than one of their opponents had asked of him, about them; and to another, that he believed that real sex-poison was in the whole affair—he heard that they exhibited “symptoms of epilepsy—squinting, &c.”

All this upheaval was connected, I think, with a chapter, some three pages long, which he contributed to an unfortunate little publication called *Give us White Men*, and a brief correspondence in a Catholic paper which it provoked. The book in question, which is typical of many, contained a good deal of what most people will consider to be amateurish talk about a serious subject. Benson alone could appeal to a firm dogma, an immutable practice, and, above all, to the supernatural. An advocate of the whip for immediate vindictive or repressive purposes, he kept insisting that purity, being connected with love, was essentially connected at one end, so to speak, with the supernatural: “Therefore, get down to God.”

He was insisting here, as always, on the positive aspect of whatever virtue he dealt with. Chastity for him had nothing, primarily, to do with abstinence; that might be (and, of course, must be, when God’s law so decreed or counselled) a consequence. The virtue in itself meant not that you loved so little that you led a life of bachelordom or spinsterhood—celibacy was strictly not chastity—but that you loved God so ardently that the squandering of self in passions became unthinkable. Purity, as he conceived it, was white indeed, but not snow-white so truly as *white-hot*.

Quite early he had recognised this.

He had written long ago, from Mirfield, quoting his own verses:

Heavenly love is not a colourless thing, but it has all

the passion of human love intensified. Our Lord really and truly does become the Spouse of the Soul. . . .

“Here dwells a heart that only lives for love,  
For warmth and colour, passion and desire ;  
Cries out for these alone : and lo ! above  
Opens a vision dim,  
Wide arms that yearn for him,  
Eyes full of longing, and a Heart of Fire.”

In the January of 1913 he went first to Miss Fullerton's nursing home, No. 9 John Street—to which *Initiation* is dedicated—and afterwards to The Nook, near Hampstead Heath, for a slight, but very painful operation, and for convalescence.

Two days before Christmas Day he had written :

I am first, exactly, “worked out.” I go home to my mother on Thursday till Monday, then to the choir school to see the play, and then to the nursing home, which appears to me now simply as HEAVEN.

Of the impression this episode made upon him I say a very little in a later chapter ; *Initiation* contains quite enough for evidence. He loved to discuss its details. “The most annoying part of it to me,” a friend, who had also been operated upon, said to him soon after it, “is that you'll write a book about yours, and pay all your expenses out of it.” “Much more than pay them !” he gleefully retorted ; “and *the book's nearly finished.*” The event made a real effect upon his constitution ; he gained, with health, a certain substantial quality, and middle age laid light fingers on his face, remodelling the lips and lower cheek especially, contracting the eyebrows a little, and allowing him to sit more often in a bowed attitude, which showed that his was no more the anguished fatigue of nerves alone, but a certain interior weariness of the whole man.

Moreover, he gave himself no rest. Far from con-

valescent, really, he went to Rome, and preached a Lent there, in months of a chill dampness, which made him miserable. Mr. R. Howden would find him upstairs, wrapped in rugs and crouching over his scaldino. No doubt he would spring up, point enthusiastically to the cardinalitial suite he occupied at San Silvestro, puff himself out, and proudly strut across the room, as though himself he wore the scarlet. But he was never to shake off the mantle of lassitude which now enveloped him.

The warning letters multiply themselves.

"Beloved Mgr.," his mother writes, "how nice to get your letter, though my brain whirls at all you are doing! I begin to fear that you have enemies who are praying, 'O my God, make him like unto a wheel.' You ARE it, anyhow."

It was of no avail. For answer, she received :

I am trying to prepare twenty-two sermons!! . . . to be preached in ten days, and have done two!! . . . Yes, things go excellently with me. I should prefer to have rather more breathing time ; but it can't be helped. . . . And, as a matter of fact, things do get done.

Mrs. Benson repeated her warning :

I can't bear you to have that continual sense of not being yourself—it's a nervous condition, as you no doubt know—but it does call out for a little "staring" and becoming yourself again—*please stare*. I know you won't like these remarks, but for some little time past I have been fearing you are running for a fall, NOT of death, but of the enforced rest of a slack time, when things won't work.

But, to his friend Mrs. Liebich, the wife of Mr. F. Liebich, of whom I speak below, he gave, even in 1914, advice which, for once, he took all too well himself.

To her, when she begged him to persuade her husband not to overwork, he answered that work never hurt anyone :



You women, if you don't mind my saying so, coddle your men too much. The more he has to do the better. I am like him also. I must have unceasing work. My father was the same. I couldn't get on without heaps to do. People tell me I shall die if I go on working as I do. Well, I would far rather be successful and die young than live to be old and a failure.

I now propose to pass directly on to the study of Mgr. Benson in certain main departments of his exterior and interior life, leaving chronology aside except in so far as it may assist in our appreciation of that spiritual development which was his.

## CHAPTER II

### APOSTOLATE

There is no expeditious road  
To pack and label men for God  
And save them by the barrel-load.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

#### I

THAT Hugh Benson's life was one of ceaseless activity on behalf of others cannot by now remain doubtful. Yet he has been heard to say again and again that he has "no pastoral soul"; and if by that we mean the temperament which makes a man happy when he is tending some designated flock, within frontiers, on a diet not, as a rule, of his own invention, nor often varying, Hugh certainly had not that. Never in his life was he tempted to see, in the Parish Clergy, anything but what was noble and normal; his own "eccentricity" he fully recognised, and was careful in all things to subordinate it to hierarchical control. At the same time he desired to "respect the type which God sought to realise in him"; and he knew that only by whirlwind and alternating silence could he so fulfil himself. Level atmosphere was not good for him; he needed changes, and violent ones. Preaching, over and above his writing, of which I speak later, instruction of converts, and "direction" were by him recognised as the main constituents of his apostolate, together with assistance given to certain enterprises of general religious importance, philanthropical and social. Of these I shall speak each in its turn, but always with the purpose of throwing light, if

possible, on Mgr. Benson himself, and not of criticising the value, say, of his methods, the truth of his philosophy, or the extent or permanence of his results. I have tried to make this account representative rather than exhaustive ; against most of its quotations rebutting extracts could probably be set, due to a different mood or circumstances. I hope, though, that the picture may be generally true ; details, to corroborate, supplement, or correct, his friends will supply each for himself.

“This evening’s preacher,” sighed the verger of a large London church, “is giving me a very great deal of trouble.” The poor man had been bewildered by the flocking crowds asking for places to be reserved, and he half wished Mgr. Benson were not among the “Great Preachers of To-day,” as *Everyman* ranked him in a full-page article on November 2, 1914.

Its writer tosses out excellent epigrams. He speaks of “the dry, roughened voice, with its crust of ice and its core of fire.” Yet not there was the magic. Nor was the magnetism in the somewhat restless eyes ; nor was the inevitable “impressiveness” in the “level torrent of words,” with their accompaniment of tense muscles and throbbing veins. Nor was it even in the preacher’s spiritual perception, so keen as to reveal the worldling’s trinity of lusts to be, to him at least, illusory ; for many share, the writer holds, that spiritual perception. Few, however, he truthfully avers, can convey it as Benson could. The hard doctrine of Christ, proclaimed in the name of a Church “whose watchwords are authority and mystery,” is preached in a manner hard, dry, and unfalteringly in keeping with its theme. Not the “large, warm kindliness” of a Canon Sheehan, the “liberal and disciplined culture” of a Canon Barry, the “sunny,

artless, spiritual intimacy" of a Father Russell is audible in Father Benson's voice ; but an unflinching proclamation of "the human in the light of the supreme call, grim and unlovely in the nakedness of its defaillance, yet invested with the one outweighing dignity—the possibility of hearing the call of God and responding to it." He offers "a moral equivalent for the hair-shirt and the scourgings" ; he echoes the Salvationists' stern sentence, "Jesus cannot be loved with impunity."

Such, then, was the more or less conscious impression made by Father Benson's later preaching, upon an alert critic. But of his external demeanour in the pulpit enough was said in an earlier chapter. Here I wish no more than to indicate the method he pursued in preparing his discourses, and to summarise the main topics of his collected sermons.

Benson believed very firmly that successful preaching could be taught and that he could teach it. He wrote to the Rev. Arthur Barry O'Neill, C.S.C., of Notre Dame, who had presented him after his visit in April, 1914, with a book called *Priestly Practice* :

MY DEAR FATHER O'NEILL,—I have read your book with great delight. And what I like about it so particularly is the *sanity* of it, if I may say so. It is so splendidly practical on what, after all, does make an immense difference—bodily health ; and on what comes almost next to it, odd time and energy. I imagine it is largely through stupidity or carelessness about things like these that mischief so often begins.

If I may dare to say so, there is one thing I don't agree with ; and, truly, I don't think I am a crank about it—viz. preparation for preaching. I hold most *violently* that even the youngest priest ought never to write out his sermon, even at the beginning of his ministry—in fact, that a sermon meant to be spoken ought not to be written. Of course I agree that in the seminary it is excellent to write essays,

meditations, &c., but these should not be delivered even before the students. The spoken and the written word seem to me simply different vehicles. I have a plan by which, I think, any young priest, *if he will take the pains*, can learn very soon to be a tolerable preacher, without writing. All this, however, is beside the point.

I like the book immensely ; and I believe it will be of real service to priests, and hence to innumerable souls.

What he here hints at he had elaborated in a letter to the Rev. J. Bradley, now of St. Cuthbert's, Bradford, and then at Ushaw :

CLIFTON DOWN HOTEL, CLIFTON, BRISTOL.

(Will this do ? This is my own system. But there are others. In great haste.—R. H. B.).

1. Preach and lecture on subjects, not texts—choose text last. And get the object in mind so clear that it is possible to state it in one sentence

*e.g.* To produce contrition.

To explain such and such a dogma.

To rebut such and such a charge.

2. Construct sermon on organic system—head, body, tail thus—

*Introd.* . . .

Points I.

II.

(III.)

(IV.)

Conclus.

These *points* are the important part, and should be done first—(not less than two or more than four)—they are the backbone. Each should be capable of statement in one sentence.

3. Construct notes deliberately and slowly, in form that the eye can take in at a glance (v. next page) : [with small neat handwriting]. Use underlining a good deal, and capital letters—and, at first, coloured inks or pencils. I believe that the memory works much more easily, *visually*, than intellectually or logically. Use other symbols or devices that catch the eye—and, when chosen, use the same in all sermons.

e.g. square brackets for illustrations [        ].

4. Write out the last sentence in full, or nearly : [and *never* in preaching attempt to develop the last sentence, however much tempted.]

5. Do all this a day or two at least before preaching ; and then, *just before preaching*, sit down in easy position with notes before you, and get the thing, like a phantom photograph, into your head. *If possible, doze or sleep* a little then, that keeps and clears memory extraordinarily. I invariably do this. [Never talk before preaching.]

6. (Let the introduction be *interesting* and apparently—rather disconnected from main subject. This catches and fixes attention.)

7. Don't bother about words *at all* beforehand—unless on a *very* thorny or difficult point or definition. This will mean slowness and halting at first—(one mustn't mind that)—but absolute safeness in a few months.

8. Never learn a sermon by heart. Know what you want to convey, absolutely clearly, but not the words (unless one is a born actor, to learn by heart means mechanicalness and dulness).

9. In speaking, take care of the consonants, and the vowels will take care of themselves.

#### SPECIMEN

(Idea to be conveyed—That the Holiness and the Scandals of the Catholic Church both support her claim to be divine.)

Texts { Is. vi. 3. Holy, Holy, Holy.  
I Tim. i. 15.

Introduction. *Our Lord was hated for Two Reasons :*

1. *Personal Holiness.* . . . (Woman in adultery . . . “they went out one by one.”)

*Teaching.* Demands he made, e.g. “Be thou perfect.”

2. *Friend of Sinners* (Zacheus . . . Magdalene)

#### 1. TWO ACCUSATIONS 2. CATHOLIC CHURCH.

1. “Too Holy” : Her teaching on sin . . . Friday fast . . . Lives of Saints . . . Religious Life.

2. “Too Unholy” : She tolerates outcasts . . . Statistics of crime. (Sac. of Penance.)

II. EXPLANATION. SHE LIKE JESUS CHRIST IS DIVINE AND HUMAN.

1. *Divine* ∴ always desires and inculcates perfection (a collector of silver keeps it spotless).

2. *Human* ∴ *tolerates* anything (she is more human than man !)

BECAUSE

(1) Human nature with sacraments is capable of sanctity.

(2) She can *save*, even if not sanctify entirely.

CONCLUSION. Her extremes, then, show her largeness. She is the Incarnation of the Love of God. She stands with her head in Heaven ; her feet at gates of Hell.

(last sentence) "Holy, H, H, is her name ; and to save sinners is her work."

It is clear that sermons prepared in this way involved an immense labour, nor is it wonderful if he preached the same sermon, or course, again and again. He preached all over the country, St. Peter's church in Edinburgh being his favourite, by far, in Scotland. And it was noticed that he not only took as much trouble over quite the poorest and simplest congregation as over the best instructed, but communicated himself as fully to them as to anyone. In London his pulpits of predilection were those of Brook Green, the Carmelite Church in Kensington, St. James', Spanish Place, Our Lady of Victories in Kensington, and in a lesser degree, the Cathedral and St. Mary's, Cadogan Square.

But his visits to these were so far from being exhausted by mere preaching that I may be permitted to insert an account of one of the characteristic days spent by him at the Carmelite Church, kindly furnished to me by Father Ambrose, O.D.C., of that Priory.

When he used to stay here the amount of work he got through was astounding, and on one occasion I said to

him, "You can't go on burning the candle at both ends or it will soon go out," and his answer came sharp and swift, "What does it matter if it gives a better light!" Take this as a sample of a week-end bit of work. He would arrive here about 1 on Saturday, leave his bag, rush off to a football match, returning about 5, swallow a cup of tea, go to his room, write a report of it for the *Daily Mail* or other paper (sometimes it would be a cricket match or even a sparring competition), then he would take supper with us—always protesting against anything but the community meagre food. Then interviews began, people waiting their turns in the three parlours, and when the female portion had left (oftener at 10.30 than any other hour) he would take some man up to his room, and with a cigarette or two work hard with him at instruction till late. Then he would get a book and devour it, and to my knowledge he often got through a fair-sized volume in a night, telling me he could stand an exam on its contents in the morning. Then up at 7, mass at 8, small breakfast at 9, during which he would read—none of us ever saw him idle. After breakfast he would see people till about 10.30, then to his room to think, and he would come down from the pulpit drenched with perspiration; a hot bath was ready for him and he would soak in it for about twenty minutes—then more interviews—lunch—off to an afternoon sermon or lecture, and oftener than not do an evening sermon too. What struck us most about him was that he could *pigeon-hole* his various subjects so wonderfully, and he told us this was the result of very hard work, for he said all his sermons, &c., were the result of real labour to him, and he was *always* nervous. He was most friendly and amiable with us all, and seemed to like being let do just as he pleased here, and felt thoroughly at home in the house. In 1913 he made his yearly retreat here, and would take nothing but our food at all his meals, and you can realise what that must have meant to him, with his brain working so rapidly. Here is the average daily food bill—breakfast, a cup of coffee with some toast; dinner at 11, vegetable soup, piece of fish with potato and greens, piece of cheese, an apple or orange and *sometimes* fruit stewed or other sweet; supper at 7.30, piece of fish or bloaters, potato and cheese.



Yet he never once complained ! When asked what he would like, the invariable answer was, "Oh, anything ; just what you have," and we had quite a fuss with him to make him eat meat.

Father Ambrose has most kindly furnished me, as well, with a complete list of the sermons given by Father Benson at the Carmes : it will be found by way of specimen in the Appendix, p. 459 ; meanwhile it may be mentioned that already on Good Friday 1907, such was the crowd at his Passion Sermon at 3 P.M., that the church was full an hour before the time announced for his sermon ; even the sanctuary was packed ; special exit doors were arranged, and the ordinary doors were reconstructed so as to open by sliding back instead of inwards, a plan of permanent value for which Fr. Benson's name may be blessed by many a generation.

The first duty of a Catholic preacher is to announce the Catholic faith. At Cambridge Benson lifted up his voice to do so. He would explain, to an eager congregation, the Search for Truth ; or rather he would portray the Seeker. And the seeker should be no great saint nor sinner, but the ordinary man whom he felt to be so singularly uncatered for—and his name should be called John.

John is religious ; or wants to be. He asks England to help him to a creed. And lo, the Denominations. . . . At least, they have in common the Bible. That their religion is all in there, each one of them agrees. He searches the Scriptures and confusion is worse confounded—he has had the misfortune to inquire for an interpretation of the text, which makes that entry into the heavenly kingdom, for which he longs, dependent on a new birth of water and of spirit. "Yes," a friend agrees, "mere Bible-reading is quite useless. You want a clear and authorised interpreter

of what you read. And here is the Church of England ready to your hand."—Alas, her very dignitaries preach in rival pulpits. Not even on the Resurrection, not to mention the Eucharist, can he find one interpretation.—Never mind, he is told; disregard her individual representatives, and trust the Church as a whole. Distressingly, he finds that precisely the Church as a whole disregards or denies the Anglican claim, and the theory tells, if anything, dead against her. He had gathered this abroad. Therefore let him study Rome. Rome is numerically huge: it is rigidly uniform in doctrine: it claims absolute authority . . . if—somehow—it were also *true*, it would be just what he was wanting. It was just, at any rate, what Christ led one to expect a Church would be, if it were to carry on His work . . . in faith and morals equally. Rome was ready to assert, ready to contradict, wholly uncompromising. John's very temptations turn into new arguments. Rome is universally distrusted: "Ye shall be hated of all men."—But that is because of her own children's sins? There have been bad Popes? Well, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net."—Yes—but her whole history is fantastic: no one else claims to work miracles at any rate. Yet, "These signs shall follow them that believe. . . ." But I should suffocate under that rigid rule, that leaden uniformity. . . . How else, though, should a Church remain so "one" that the *world* may believe, as Christ had prayed?

To the Petrine claims John turns, and the customary arguments pursue themselves, set out with caustic humour, and at times a rich and popular rhetoric. In the end, John grants that Pius has succeeded to the prerogatives of Peter, and yet . . . how different is St. Peter's from St. Peter. But an acorn, and a child in a perambulator, and their relation to the destined oak and athlete, light up in his

brain the notion of development—now, had the Church but the right to claim that process as her own ! And lo, the parable, if not of acorn and oak, at least of tiny seed and mighty mustard tree ; and St. Paul's untiring vision of the gradual Pleroma, the building of Christ's body unto its perfect stature. And John's meditation on this amazing theme, as Benson preached it, rose (as we have read) into impassioned prayer. A new ghost, however, comes to peer at him. How can he be sure that the body and the tree have grown aright ? Yet the very suggestion seems blasphemy. Shall Christ indeed grow up twisted and deformed ? *Rightness* of growth seems, surely, guaranteed. In a Church, this *rightness* has been called infallibility. Clearly not *everybody* is infallible : yet clearly if everyone is fallible, "I may as well give up" : Christ's message has escaped the world's certainty. And, other than Rome, does any single body of Christians claim infallibility ? Not one.

One more puzzle remains for John to surmount. What, in fine, is this path he has been treading. One of sheer intellect ? no ; yet intelligent and intelligible. Of sheer emotion ? certainly not ; yet with the increasing light, increase of warmth kept pace. Faith ? What is faith ? Well—a gift, at any rate. "One thing I know ; I was blind, once, and now I see." The whole man has moved, massively, forward : and over and above the combined assent of all that is human in him has come a consciousness of a new power, which is beyond the human, and is super-nature. To the priest John goes : instructions follow ; he professes the Faith, and is absolved : he is a Catholic ; to-morrow he will receive communion. . . .

"What then does anything else matter ? Sorrow can be no more than a prick, death no more than a passing swoon : for to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

A second group of sermons (or *essays*, as he calls them) he published in a volume called *Christ in the Church*. They had been spoken, in substance, at San Silvestro in Lent 1909, at the Carmelite Church in Lent 1910, and at Mrs. J. Gardiner's house in Boston at the Easter of the same year. Hitherto Father Benson had as it were led the soul, by the hand, from the bleak world outside, up to the Church envisaged as an institution, founded and protected by Christ, or, if you will, a house, dwelt in by Christ. He now displayed the same Church to the soul, but, as a Person, and that, not merely as an Ambassador from Christ, nor even the Bride of Christ, but as, in a most mysterious manner, Christ Himself. He was always fond of reminding himself that the crowd, still more so a society, has a vital unity other than that merely of the sum-total of the individuals which compose it; that the human body itself, when its individual cells are in proper relation each to each, blossoms forth into a life of the *whole*, which is distinct from theirs. So too the Church, not metaphorically and allegorically, but substantially and vitally, is to be regarded as no mere aggregate of Christians, but as one living whole in which Christ plays an organic part, and is so interconnected with living Christians that one life circulates in Him and them; while He is so destined to them as to be as unintelligible without them as they certainly are without Him. The Vine, the Bread, the Body, the Lover and his Beloved; all these, indeed, are metaphors, used by Himself and His Interpreters to reveal the supreme Christian mystery of which the reality defies, indeed, all formula of language and even thought.

Monsignor Benson proposed—not to “prove”—but to “recommend” this doctrine, the essence of Catholicism, by portraying the Life of the Church as strictly parallel,

even historically, with that of her historical Founder. "Shepherds and Kings" worshipped at Bethlehem : Peter and Paul are representatives of His apostolic band : the utterly humble, and the cultured ; the extremely simple and uneducated, and "the extremely shrewd and thoughtful" are the two classes he sees to be drawn towards Catholicism and to remain faithful to it. The "bourgeois" mind, the satisfied mass of men, do not come. Alone of Christian Churches the Catholic cultivates systematically an "inner" life of contemplation to be set beside Christ's "Hidden life" at Nazareth : alone of world-religions, she joins this with a passionate yearning to convert the world. And she is tempted : if she be God's own, why does He so often leave her, to the earthly eye, so destitute ? or why does He by no startling miracle, *force* the world into the recognition of her divinity ? and why may she, by no abatement to any so slight degree of her high doctrine, sweep the mediocre millions into her net ? And lo, the three temptations of Christ, in the wilderness, on the temple pinnacle, and on the mountain. In her ministry, she, like Him, preaches all her doctrine with Authority ; she, like Him, claims at least to work by miracles : she puts in the very forefront of her gospel, the doctrine of Pain ; pain intelligent, chosen, vicarious, redemptive ; those who attack her fall best into the groups of which Caiaphas, Herod, and Pontius Pilate stand representative ; she treads, through centuries, one long Via Dolorosa ; she dies daily ; her dirge is sung by prince and professor ; system after system seals her tomb, and behold she lives, and death has no dominion over her.

And at last, as I see her moving once more in the dawn-light of each new day, or in the revelation of evening, as the sun of this or that dynasty rises and sets, I understand that He who was dead has come forth once more with

healing in His wings, to comfort those that mourn, and to bind up the broken-hearted ; and that His coming is not with observation, but in the depth of night, as His enemies slept and His lovers woke from sorrow.

Yet even as I see this I understand that Easter is but Bethlehem once again ; that the cycle runs round again to its beginning, and that the conflict is all to fight again ; for they will not be persuaded, though one rises daily from the dead.

The next volume which he published was called *The Friendship of Christ*, and consists of sermons, abbreviated, which were first preached at the Carmelite Church in Kensington in 1910, and again, with others, at San Silvestro in 1911. For Foreword there is nothing but the little meditation he once used at Mirfield and to which he remained so pathetically attached. I cannot explain to myself why I seem to find in this the most intimate expression of that tenderness which was in Benson's heart, but which he scarcely in any circumstance of his life revealed. There really was a wistfulness in him, a yearning for sympathy which he was never quite to win from men. He turned his thought from them to the interior friendship of that Christ whom, he had learnt, he was no more to call just "Master."

"Christ in the interior soul" is the theme of the first set of sermons ; and after a sober panegyric of that friendship which transcends, for him, the love of married life or the passion of courtship—and I will say once for all that his ideal was the masculine love of David for Jonathan ; and his conviction, that it throve best in silence—he proclaims that it is possible between the soul and Christ ; and that too, no merely selfish exclusive friendship, but one which shall transfigure all human friendship too, inasmuch as in each friend is seen, scarcely latent, the supreme Friend. This

is the theme of the book. The interior love begins by the revelation of Christ not as a theme for thought, an author of a code, not even as a Name that claims our prayers : in some tiny event He shows Himself as a Person. A Person whose first encounter is sweet indescribably, for the most part, and all of whose ways are peace, whose world is Paradise. Then begins Purgation. The soul is disillusioned with regard to earthly things : not quailing beneath this destructive power of Christ, she must be taught to rest not even in Christ's gifts, but in His lonely self. Pleasure in, say, Church music, had first to be transcended ; now, if you will, happiness in prayer. And finally, Christ's self must so be kept that even He is, in a sense, relinquished. That is, not even the soul's own response to His must be clung to : she must be content to love, not with her effort, but at His magnetic summoning of love. She may then be illuminated, and learns practically (not theoretically perhaps) how right is Pain : then, how true (again in *practice*) are mysteries ; and finally how actual is Christ's presence and how continuous. And behold, a terror. It is from these, who have been admitted to His secret garden, that His Judases are drawn.

This friendship, Father Benson explains at the opening of that part of his book which deals with "Christ in the exterior," is possible not to Catholics only but to all who know the Name of Jesus, and even (in their measure) to those who descry the Lover of all souls only in dim disguises, as did a Marcus Aurelius, a Gautama, or a Confucius. But there are millions to whom He is given uniquely, that is, in the Eucharistic Communion, and in whose Tabernacle He abides ; and these millions, again, *are* that Church which *is* (he never tires of telling us) the Christ. Then, the individual soul who loves Christ must be more than

just obedient to, or "friendly" to, His Church. She is bone of His bone ; flesh of His flesh ; what of love and tenderness the soul would give to Him, she must give to Her. In the Priest, in the Saint, above all in Mary,—yes, in the Sinner, in the Average Man, in the Sufferer, Christ clothes Himself, in disguises different not only in appearance but in nature : yet are none of these merely masks ; what hides Him, holds Him ; in varying degrees, all the Church's parts are sacramental.

Christ in History shows finally that He is that utter friend who loves not only enough to give, but enough to ask. Upon the Cross he gives, and He needs. He asks His friends for water, while giving them His blood. . . .

There is not one avenue of sense or thought, but the Figure of Christ stands in it ; not one activity open to man, but the "Carpenter's Son" is there ; beneath the stone, and in the heart of the wood. . . .

So, little by little as we go through life, following with a hundred infidelities and a thousand blunders, with open defiances and secret sins, yet following, as Peter followed through the glare of the High Priest's fire to the gloom of penitence where Christ's eyes could shine—as we go, blinded by our own sorrow, to the ecstasy of His Joy, thinking to find Him dead, hoping to live on a memory, instead of confident that He is living and looking to the "to-day" in which He is even more than yesterday—little by little we find that there is no garden in which He does not walk, no door that can shut Him out, no country road where our hearts cannot burn in His company.

And, as we find Him ever more and more without us, in the eyes of those we love, in the Voice that rebukes us, the spear that pierces us, the friends that betray us, and the grave that waits for us : as we find Him in His Sacraments and His Saints—in all those august things which He Himself designed as trysting-places with Himself, at once we find association and memory, deep buried in the thoughts of that heart of ours that seems most wholly neglectful of Him.



So then, he asserts His dominion from strength to strength ; claiming one by one those powers we had thought to be most our own. To our knowledge He is the Most Perfect ; to our imagination He is our dream ; to our hopes their Reward.

A final volume, entitled *The Paradoxes of Christianity*, was made up of sermons, constantly repeated in whole or part, dealing with topics already included in what has been analysed above. Hugh Benson loved to see in the Church the reconciling of opposites, a characteristic well symbolising, or flowing from, or indeed constituting her *Catholicism* ; she was the Church of sinner and saint, fool and sage ; she was material and she was spiritual, and all this texture of contradictions she inherited, he saw, from the Master, at her back, Jesus Christ, that is, true God and true Man.

It was often said, in Monsignor Benson's lifetime, that although with his unfailing grace of manner he lent himself generously, and indeed enthusiastically, to the support of various Catholic enterprises, he was at heart interested in none of them, and in a true sense did not even believe in what is generically known as "social work."

Whatever of qualification this statement may afterwards receive, let us at once make one complete exception to its universality, and lay it down that throughout his life, he preserved an almost passionate affection for the various enterprises known by the name of *St. Hugh's*. They were at first connected with the Anglican Charterhouse Mission in South-East London. This was begun in 1885, in Tabard Street, Southwark, a spot notorious through centuries as among the foulest in London south of the Thames. Like all heroic enterprises, it had a beginning full of splendid difficulty, of mingled tragedy and farce, and

of suffering rewarded by a joy scarcely to be recaptured in the days of greater things. The Charterhouse Boys' Club and the Home for destitute boys catered frankly for the *Hooligan in embryo*, for the boy with no home, and "known to the police." Rapidly outgrowing its first premises, St. Hugh's migrated in 1900 to Clapham; and on December 20, 1900, the Rev. Hugh Benson was to be found speaking at an Intercessory Service in its new home. In 1901 Benson preached at the Church of St. John Baptist, Pimlico, for St. Hugh's, and wrote the little life of his own and the home's patron, St. Hugh of Lincoln, which remained popular ever afterwards. Records from 1901-1903 are for the most part missing, nor can I be sure that in the enormous *dossier* relating to St. Hugh's, many references which would prove the activity of Father Benson's interest may not have escaped me. Meanwhile the work proceeds: the chapel is opened; a bootmaker's shop is erected and the boys learn to make their own boots. The older ones are sent to a grammar-school; quite little ones are nursed in a cottage home, St. Joseph's. Significant names, too, begin to recur in the reports: Don Bosco; Francis of Sales; Cottolengo; Vincent of Paul; and at last the Salesian Institutes of Turin and Milan are frankly recognised as the original inspiration of St. Hugh's. Meanwhile photographs reveal the Catholic air of the Chapel, though the Tabernacle is not yet above the altar: on this side and on that, Mary is seen throughout the house holding up her Child for the better worship of these children. The *home-like* atmosphere of the house is already strong; and the holidays by the seaside are a regular institution.

In 1902 St. Hugh's appealed earnestly, first to Cowley, then to Mirfield, for a permanent chaplain who should take the instruction of the entire house into his care and hear

the boys' confessions regularly. Application was particularly made to Father Hugh. Father Frere, however, could not allow a permanent appointment ; but wrote on March 7, 1902, suggesting to Benson that he should spend some of his summer at St. Hugh's. This, I gather, Benson could not manage.

In the September, moreover, of 1903 he became a Catholic. Mr. Norman F. Potter, then in charge of the homes, thereupon entered into close correspondence with him ; and in every step of his own journey towards Rome—a goal happily reached in the autumn of 1904—the common-sense, honourable instinct, and spiritual ideal of his closest friend were ever at his service.

Somehow the full expansion of St. Hugh's seemed reserved for the Catholic atmosphere. Naturally I do not propose to trace it step by step, nor even Father Benson's connection with its various enterprises. He was swift to speak at drawing-room meetings on its behalf. Thus at Lady Encombe's house in December, 1904, or at Brighton, at Norfolk House, on November 17, 1905, and in 1907 ; he loved to preach on its patronal festival, and to speak of it at the Oratory or the Carmelites ; or to write flying sheets, as in 1908, on St. Vincent's Cripples' Home. To the Eton boys he often spoke, usually in the house of Mrs. Warre Cornish, who understood his affection for St. Hugh's ; and was for much, quite in these later times, in introducing the homes to a wider circle of French and Belgian friends. Almost on the threshold of his death he wrote, when the War was adding its special anxieties to the many which constantly harassed the founder of St. Hugh's :

SKELWITH FOLD, AMBLESIDE,  
*September 26, 1914.*

MY DEAR NORMAN,—I do indeed wish every success to the appeal that M. René Bazin is making for your boys. I am delighted to think that I have known your work right

back in the years in which we were both Protestants, and continuously ever since : and have known, even in detail, what a splendid work it is. I am certain that it has only to be made known to a few more charitable people, to be set for ever beyond the reach of anxiety.—Ever yours affectionately,

ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

Since it has been my privilege to share Monsignor Benson's intimate acquaintance with St. Hugh's house, especially in the last few years, I feel I can safely assign, what is more important than detail, the causes of the predilection he always had for it.

"I have a most tremendous ideal," he once wrote, italicising the whole sentence, "as to what our Lord means you to do for His Church." In St. Hugh's, Clapham, Hugh Benson saw, with much else, a renewal of the Franciscan spirit in the Church. Believing, as he did, in a Church which is essentially institutional, Benson could not possibly disbelieve in the value and indeed necessity of Institutions. They were the "matter," with its limitations and laws, of the great Sacrament. But all his life he was the determined foe of institutionalism. And all his life he perceived around him the inevitable human tendency whereby the officers of institutions sooner or later begin to put the institution, with its rules and programme, first. Rules, programmes, discipline and schedule, he considered as necessary for the preservation of the Spirit, as the skeleton is for the human body : but the man is not his skeleton, nor exists for it. In St. Francis he thought that he perceived the eternal and most successful type of loyal liberty and unfettered orthodoxy. In him too, of course, he perceived that singing joy in Christ, and that triumph not only over, but *in* human nature, and indeed in all things that are created—sacramental, they too, once the indwelling

Sanctifier has been acknowledged—which are among the supremest marks of sanctity : of this too he thought he recognised a generous measure in St. Hugh's. Not that he disapproved of existing institutions. Again and again he enthusiastically panegyrises Father Bans's home, for instance, and Father Berry's. Not that he expected, or wished, St. Hugh's to rival them. The idea were ridiculous : the very fact, that it was of the essence of St. Hugh's to number few sons, and of most other homes to include as many as possible, precluded it. But he could not see why, among the Catholic enterprises of England, there should not be homes which really were homes in the full sense : familiar, full of personal relationships ; catering (as his consistent ideal had been) for the individual, not the mass. Objections on the ground of expense in men and money he brushed aside. Of course it was expensive. A Socialist state might be run more economically than a number of self-governing households : but not Creation would then, he held, be imitated, nor the religion of the Incarnate, nor the Holy Family. And no one was obliged to contribute. . . . If there were those who liked to put their money into this affair, well, was it not their own ? All he asked was, has the undertaking been justified by success ? Amply, he answered. He loved St. Hugh's, and haunted it. No uniform ; no porter, no cane. "No nerve-shattering loud bells." Jolly meals ; whistling overhead ; "cheerful noise" all round you. "You can eat chops like that." No shyness : "go round the bedrooms and they grunt good night at you." Yet "not a rowdy place : extraordinary order : it seems to go without machinery." Religion is the secret : as at the outset, the conversion of these boys was not imposed, but almost resisted, anyhow, left to their unmodified free-will, so now, save for the Mass, when a priest was there—brief morning

and evening prayers ; nothing was obligatory, and freedom in devotion was recompensed by fervour in devotion. I am not criticising, but relating his vision of St. Hugh's : the theory by which he could corroborate it was, however, perfectly clear, and is that, say, of Mr. Preston Weir, to be found in his book, *Where Education Fails*, especially in the chapter "Wastage after School" ; in the important studies of *Problems of Boy Life*, edited by Mr. J. H. Whitehouse, M.P., especially in the paper called "Homes for Working Boys," by the Rev. W. H. H. Elliott, M.A., head of the Cambridge House. It was that too of Lord Milner, and induced him (and so many others !) generously to support St. Hugh's, a place, as he said, which recognised "the importance of doing things thoroughly, and of seeing a few individuals *right through*." The terrible danger is, these men perceive, that the institutions should pick boys from the gutter, and after a brief space of corporate protection, turn them into a world where they may or may not "make good" among the conflicting rains and winds which beat upon their unstable instincts not yet controlled by an established character. St. Hugh's aimed at turning out a *few* boys, permanently and completely formed, "complete citizens," Catholic gentlemen at least in destiny.<sup>1</sup> Such is the theory, which may or may not commend itself to critics.

Thus it may be hoped that Benson's sentiment, and even his reasoned view in regard of St. Hugh's, is clear. He was eager for its ever greater expansion.<sup>2</sup> But recently,

<sup>1</sup> Especially was Father Benson interested in the *Stapledon Fund*, by which the sons of indigent gentlemen were saved from relegation to public institutions of a charitable kind. It was a scandal and a horror to Hugh Benson, that a boy should ever be allowed to lose caste, or to fail of a chance, at least, of that future to which his antecedents seemed to point him.

<sup>2</sup> In fact he offered Mr. Potter a house at Hare Street for a quite new sort of enterprise, and he wished himself to be spiritual director to this new community. The plan, however, proved quite impracticable.

owing to the regretted failure of Mr. Potter's health, St. Hugh's has been most capably taken over, first by the indomitable energy of Monsignor Barnes, and now as an Incorporated Society with the Bishop of Southwark as its President, and with Monsignor Barnes as chairman of managers. Many members of the old committee have promised to continue as Directors of the new Society, and the "provision of a house and education for boys of the professional and middle classes, who have come to need through death of parents or other misfortunes, is now the exclusive object of the work." In all the circumstances, nothing better could be wished, and it may be well believed that Monsignor Benson's prayer and benediction will follow the one philanthropic enterprise to which, from Mirfield to his death, he gave his heart.

Another enterprise in which Monsignor Benson took a quite special interest appears to me to have been the "Motor Mission." It is true that his personal connection with it was intermittent and did not last long: but I know that he ranked it, for importance, very high indeed.

The Motor Mission is an element in the propaganda of the Catholic Missionary Society, which undertakes the spreading, by every active means, of the Catholic Faith in England. The Motor Mission consists of a kind of gipsy van which is really an automobile chapel; it contains an altar, harmonium, kneeling-stools, a large crucifix and a banner of Our Lady, and a huge "question box." It tours the country, preceded by those who should make straight its paths; and its evangelists, to those who raise the cry: "No Popery!" retort in Father Bernard Vaughan's now consecrated phrase: "Know Popery." The car was blessed by the Archbishop of Westminster in June, 1911,

and the first Mass was said in it at Ware by the President of St. Edmund's College on June 19. The association was admirably conceived. St. Edmund's, more than anywhere, perhaps, in England, links up the fortunes of modern English Catholics with that superb tradition now so accessible to all in the great series of volumes its historians are producing.

The motor's first tour was in the Eastern counties, and from August 14-20 Father Benson preached for it at East Dereham in Norfolk. The mission had started amid storms. At Haverhill the advent of the motor had been well advertised, and its preaching was rivalled by some Kensit lectures, which, promising to deal with immoralities of monks and nuns, attracted a delighted group of boys and bar-loungers. They, when the missionaries came out of the Corn Exchange, where they held their first meeting, booed and hustled these priests, and, even more, a party of ladies (one only was a Catholic) who had motored over from a distance and appeared fair game. The crowd grew, and appeared at the outset to represent public opinion : but the cheerful courtesy of the missionaries and the extreme pluck and *savoir-faire* of the visitors created a revulsion of feeling little short of miraculous, and the Fathers left Haverhill escorted by a cheering crowd who bade them welcome back.

Of the ladies who played so notable a part in preparing for the different missions, it may be permitted to mention two, both withdrawn, to-day, from this life of visible activity.

Miss Elizabeth Anstice Baker was herself a convert, and her relationships had put her into a fascinating connection with the political interests of both England and America. In her Father Benson found one of his most trusted allies : in his letters I constantly find him



mentioning her as "a *wonderful* woman ; a *very* great friend of mine, with whom I want to put you in touch. You can trust her," he said, "as you would a priest." He wrote, too, a preface to a late edition of her *Modern Pilgrim's Progress*, a book which has brought incalculable help to souls touched slightly, it may be, by the *maladie du siècle*, but anyhow utterly impervious to the customary pious or apologetic literature. Her talents, however, were practical and organising rather than philosophical or literary. She possessed in a high degree that personal magnetism, that utter fearlessness, that temperamental incapacity for saying that this or that *can't* be done, which carries every position however impregnable it be deemed, which compensates for what is vulgarly esteemed of supreme importance in the way of outside attractiveness, and which can neutralise the gravest disadvantages, such as the severe deafness which she did not for a moment intend to allow to interfere with her plans. I have seen a platformful of grave personages, looking ruefully at a great lecture hall, too thinly populated for its size : "If only," it was sighed, "they had all been told to congregate in the body of the hall, and not to scatter through the galleries. . . . Mismanagement as usual !" "Did I understand you to say," murmured Miss Baker, "that you wanted the galleries cleared ?" "Oh well . . . it would have been very nice," they answered, "but it's clearly quite impossible to do it *now*." Miss Baker effaced herself. A moment later, a stir was noticeable in the hall. Distant tiers of seats were being evacuated. . . . The front rows on the floor were filling up. . . . In less than seven minutes this deaf old lady had effected the results despaired of by princes and by prophets. The amazing *aplomb* with which she, on these motor expeditions, carried all before her, from

starched and High Church Vicar to Nonconformist grocer, made the endless delight of Monsignor Benson, and certainly, were such our duty, could be illustrated with the most delightful and indiscreet of anecdotes. It would be quite wrong, however, were I to leave the impression of an ardent, exterior, and perhaps impertinent activity. Her tenderness and infinite tolerance, in which a Christian love and a deep knowledge of the world and of human hearts helped each the other, were more secret, perhaps, but not less real or loved.

Beside her name I would recall that of Lady Agnes Noël, who, while she could not ever have imitated Miss Baker in her vigorous apostolate, by her own simplicity and sweetness of address spread around her, to an extent which no human measures can define, the fragrance and the loveliness of Christ. In the ministry of the "many-splendoured thing," servants as different as Lady Agnes and Miss Baker work side by side in harmony, and their functions are complementary. The one by her powerful personality, her masculine grip of the hand, her frank attack, never quite concealing the depth and *holiness* of her inner life; the other, by her gentle sympathy earned by much suffering, though so childlike and spontaneous, by her singing, her quick smile, her absolute self-disregard, joined in a work which those who had knowledge of it cannot forget. To the memory, then, of two friends let so much have been said; and may we be pardoned for what is not really a digression, inasmuch as not to the writer only, but to Monsignor Benson, not least in connection with his esteemed Motor Mission, these two names were dear.

It was owing to methods and personalities such as these that when Monsignor Benson came in August to speak at East Dereham, the Town Hall, refused at Haverhill, was

crowded night by night to suffocation ; the attention paid became, after preliminary hustlings, ideal ; and the demand for tracts, C. T. S. pamphlets and the like, was enormous. He repeated the history of the Plain Man, calling him this time John Jones, and then suddenly declaring his identity with himself. "It is my own story I have been telling you." Benson had his audience in hand throughout ; nowhere was the mission more successful. Submerged Catholics were everywhere discovered and brought to the surface ; above all, everywhere permanent arrangements for Catholic worship were made. Buntingford itself was the last place visited in the 1912 tour of the Motor Mission. Naturally its success was tremendous. Benson lectured himself and was cheered from the beginning. "It makes me want to be good" was a young man's comment at the end of the lecture on Monks and Nuns, the very last sentiment generated in the souls of the rowdies who attended the "rival" Protestant lectures "for men only." These, however, were thinly populated. There the lecturer was considered "no class" by the democracy itself. "Bring a Church here, and you'll get the whole town ;" "Why weren't we told these things years ago ?" "I've learnt more about the Bible these last three nights than in all my life before ;" "If these men were here for a year, I would not miss a night," were the workmen's phrases overheard after the Buntingford "talks." The local population spontaneously made short work of such coyote-like yappings as made themselves heard in rivalry—a quoted phrase which I should fear to invent, in view of the unexpected speech uttered by a Protestant railwayman at the close of the last lecture :

"One moment, sir, before this meeting closes. I wish to propose a hearty vote of thanks to Monsignor Benson

and the Catholic priests who have been with us this week. I wish to say that Buntingford people appreciate the manly way you have answered every question put into the question box, and that without calling anybody hard names either. We wish you good luck wherever you go, and trust that other audiences will enjoy and appreciate your meetings as we have done. Come again: and you will always be welcome."

Benson spoke again for the Motor Chapel at the "Home Missions" meeting held at Norwich on August 5, 1912, during the Catholic Congress held in that town, and again at the big garden party and general meeting of Associates held at the Mission House, Brondesbury Park, on June 12, 1914.

But I will not embark upon a vain repetition of dates and speeches. He was attracted first of all to the Motor Mission, frankly, because he found it "sporting." At the garden party he was brilliant and correct; at the Congress, brilliant and popular; at Buntingford he was immensely happy, "at home," genial, and at his ease. Yet at none of these places did he enjoy himself so wholeheartedly, perhaps, as on certain days at East Dereham, where he was personally hustled, and had to wrestle not only with the floods of perspiration which the unusual heat made worse for him than ever, but with a crowd of hooligans, to whom the loud squeak (as it is described in the *Missionary Gazette*) into which his rapid voice rose at the end of sentences, proved so irresistibly amusing as to be imitated. When the catcalls became utterly beyond him, he would stop dead in the middle of a sentence, glare, quell the "coyotes," continue without break of thought or even of grammar, and retire triumphant to the hotel and his collarless game of bowls. But if he went to work, as so many of his country go to war, in the spirit of sport, he, like them, had plenty of

grim resolve beneath the gallant cheer of his attack. He went so far as, by a heroic effort, to correct the lightning rapidity of his speech, to which his critics took exception, and even the mirth-provoking squeak. This implied huge self-control. And I need scarcely say that this bright love of the sport did not exclude a most grave and reasoned creed that Christ had said, "*Go, teach all nations,*" not, "*Let all the nations come, and then let them be taught.*" Byways and hedges were what attracted Benson; he loved to go out into them. Studies, lecture-rooms, even pulpits, pleased him less. Anything stuffy, enclosed, "with the lid on," as he said, depressed him. He looked forward to the day when Franciscan Motor Missions and processions and publicity of all sorts should bring religion out once more from that sacristy in which the politician was fain to pack it, so that there it might perish, with all its *gens lucifuga*, of dry-rot. "*Homme noir, d'où sortez-vous ?*" was a question he was determined should never be asked of him. He was going to be in the open air, recognised, welcomed, from the outset; and this, too, was partly why, perhaps, he was determined not even to be black, but blaze in purple.

Two other societies which he used to regard with a somewhat awestruck admiration were the Catholic Women's League and the Catholic Social Guild. The admiration was altogether genuine, and the awe not wholly a whimsical affectation. He perceived in both, though especially in the latter, a certain apotheosis of theory of which he was timid. He was constantly repeating that he knew nothing about these things, and as for theories, he committed himself to very little, and was fully prepared to use two wholly opposite systems of ideas, as in his two eschatological works he made clear. He believed strongly that the Supernatural was the only cure for sick society; but while he recognised

that a certain amount of machinery was undoubtedly needed to enable it to reach and modify mankind, he thought, here as ever, that machinery was rather a dangerous thing.

When, however, he perceived an association usefully at work, generously sanctioned by authority, and soliciting his aid, he gladly did all he could for it. The Catholic Women's League fulfilled all these conditions, and though in its early days he was in no contact with it, later on he lectured for it a good deal, at least in connection with the Nurses' Guild it has organised.

As for the Catholic Social Guild, its scope was more circumscribed than that of the Catholic Women's League, and still more alien to his tastes. He had imagination, of course, and common sense, and saw quite well the enormous import of the social revolution at which we are assisting, but he professed no special remedies. He had a profound reverence for anyone who will *study*, and in the Social Guild what he admired most, after the human sympathy which animated its members, was the zeal they brought to the study of questions to which he quite well saw many Catholics were deaf, or, at least, were prepared to offer an academic and ready-made answer. It is at all times disappointing to be given a stone for bread, but very annoying indeed to have it hurled at you. The Guild, he thought, was loyal and daring, safely to be followed, yet something of a pioneer ; he was no socialist, not even a democrat, yet he had no patience at all with those who accused the Catholic Social Guild of socialism, any more than he had with those who spoke of democracy as a panacea, or even as a remedy at all. I imagine he doubted whether it ever could exist, as it most certainly never has existed. Yet I will confess that when he spoke for the

Guild, as he did for instance in the rooms of the Catholic Association in the June of 1913, and at a Conference later on in the Assumption Convent in Kensington Square, you would have felt that he went a long way, in his courteous adaptability, towards the proclamation of democracy. What he undoubtedly did feel was the duty of Catholics to "move" with the times, not necessarily with a motion of identification, but at least parallel, keeping to their own path, yet with an eye upon each advance of contemporary thought. In this sense he often, in private conversation, spoke of the Catholic Social Guild as one of the pillars of the Catholic Church in England, and, mentioning it at the Carmelite Church in Kensington, quoted, I am told, a high Anglican dignitary as declaring that it had done more than any other sectarian social union in this country. He was announced as intending to speak for the Guild upon the War when death cancelled these preoccupations.

I may ask leave to quote from two groups of letters in illustration of his keen welcome of what appeared, to his somewhat superficial glance, a satisfactory reform; and again, a more fundamental distrust of the whole so-called democratic movement:

Do go (he wrote to Miss Mary Samuel Daniel) and see the L.C.C. model dwelling-houses near St. Etheldreda's, Ely Place, and near St. Alban's, Holborn. They are between the two. There is the housing solution, I think. Splendid!

Meanwhile to his mother he had written, on various occasions, as follows:

Did you see the account of the Socialist meeting at K——? Keir Hardie & Co. entertained by the Community. I HATE that kind of business. And the *cheek* of some one, a clergyman, who said that the "Church" was essentially socialistic! It is nothing of the kind.

And again :

The sole virtue that the horny-handed son of toil claims is honesty, and apparently he hasn't even the elements of it. Poor and dishonest, and dishonest in the most exquisitely mean circumstances imaginable. And it is apparently just the same always and everywhere. I am no socialist.

Later :

M—— a peer. How very extremely funny. Really, of all Governments this is about the most dismally absurd. For the first time in my life I am really beginning to have political views, which chiefly consist in loathing Liberalism.

To avoid the possible misapprehension, I would like to repeat that his temperament led him on the one hand to encourage rather than to depress ; to see " that by which a thing lives rather than by what it dies " ; to exult in each new evidence of Catholic life and effort, especially where non-Catholics seemed to be first or more noticeably in the field. Moreover, he was almost passionately indignant with the ordinary life of the English rich, as I have often had to indicate. Country-house existence was to him one long killing of time, that earthly reflection of eternity ; it was a bleeding of the soul white. And he had not the slightest doubt that the whole of the old system was crumbling into collapse. He does not preach or applaud this so much as half-anxiously surmise it ; Lady Beatrice and the Vicar, in *The Coward*, give occasion for a number of little hints, if you will look for them, that the reign of Squire and Lady Bountiful is finished. He has no doubt of the impending revolution, though he will not define its character :

August 9 [1907].

There's no doubt a great sense of disaster coming in England. It is all rather vague and indefinable ; but it seems to me that evil is coming closer and closer—I don't



mean to me, that would be hysteria—but to other people ; it's in the air. It's like a coming thunderstorm. Well, I'm thankful I'm safe indoors.

He will not dream, therefore, of joining in any attack upon the Catholic Social Guild or such journals as support its interests ; he will, with wide sympathy, work on its behalf, incarnating meanwhile his ultimate ideals in a letter written to the *Westminster Gazette*, though never inserted, on July 15, 1913. It carries on the suggestion of a well-known authoress, which had appeared there already.

DEAR SIR,—I was much interested by a letter in a recent issue of your paper with regard to the relief of the tramp. For, although it does not expressly mention the point, its suggestion recalls the fact that until the dissolution of the Religious Houses there was practically no such "road-problem" as that which confronts us to-day ; the Religious Houses provided, in the *aula pauperum*, not only for such distressful cases as those which she mentions, but in the system of "corrodies" for the yet more lamentable sufferers amongst the decayed gentlefolk. It may possibly, too, be of interest to your readers to know that more than one Religious House to-day, notably the great Charterhouse at Partridge Green and the Carmelite Priory in Church Street, Kensington, still relieve the poor at the gate in the good old-fashioned Christian way—a way, too, that somehow does not present to the poor who are so relieved the degrading suggestions of our Poor-Law system. But the most remarkable example known to me of this kind of relief is at the Franciscan Monastery of the Atonement near New York, where the tramp is relieved and known as "Brother Christopher," and is encouraged to work in return for the relief and shelter he receives.

It is probably impracticable, however, that Religious should do all that is necessary in this regard, especially in our own country. Is it quite inconceivable, then, that your correspondent's suggestion should be widely taken up, and that persons who have sufficient leisure and means should, working on the motive of pure charity which inspires her own efforts, do something at any rate to relieve, in a manner

that does not injure the self-respect of the poor, the enormous sum of misery that streams along our roads to-day.—  
I am, &c., ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

"We can't think," this lady afterwards said to him, "why they didn't put your letter in."

"Oh!" he answered, "I wasn't surprised. I just sent it on the chance. In writing one has to do one's best, and leave the result in God's hands; if the work is used, then you know it was needed; and if it isn't used, you know Almighty God did not require your services in that particular way."

"That makes it very easy! I wanted your advice about writing: Catholic editors so often ask for my stories for nothing, and other papers pay very well. Do you think it is best just to do exactly as I am asked?—to give what I am asked to give, and to accept what comes? That is how I try to live, believing that God rules the world, and that He will arrange everything for us, if we never think of ourselves."

"Oh! if you are on *those* terms with Almighty God," he exclaimed, "you will be all right."

"It seems to answer. We have no income, but we love 'the Lady Poverty,' and our work brings in just enough for our charities and our own needs."

And then Hugh Benson added quickly, "But you must make no reservation: you mustn't say 'Yes, I'll give God everything He asks for, if I can keep my home,' or 'if I can keep my position.' You must be willing to sacrifice *everything*—willing to go to the workhouse, willing to be a tramp on the road. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes. My husband and I often talk of the possibility, and he says he wouldn't mind in the least. He is an angel."

*"He must be."*

He recognised how high a proportion of this doctrine was idealistic, but he never at any time shrank from surrounding his penitents with the tinted illumination of idealism. Since they in many cases lived in the mists, gigantic shadows, eddying splendours, distorted figures seemed to surround and beckon or repel, confuse or dazzle them, and their obedient efforts were very often foiled or flustered at the outset ; still, he held it was better so to have tried. "Do the next thing," was his refrain, and a counsel he himself lived up to equally after success or failure.

He energetically recommended, too, the services of the Correspondence Guild, which seeks to put lonely Catholics, especially converts, in touch with one another. He was especially content when its good offices brought to such an isolated soul, not only letters, but visitors who might reveal themselves, with time, as friends.

"I am delighted," he wrote to a very lonely convert : "you have got another Catholic to talk to ! Do you know the way that images visualise themselves sometimes ? I picture you often as a kind of candle-flame on a windy coast, with no other candle near—you get blown about, of course, and feel entirely alone ; but there you are, burning, thank God ! and I am looking forward to the time when other candles are lighted all along the windy coast, from you.

Mr. G. F. Barnard, again, reminds me of the immense power which he recognised as lodged in the modern Press. The pulpit, he declared at the Norwich Congress, was still more picturesque than the *Daily Mail*, but already less powerful.

Mr. Barnard writes to me :

In his dealings with the Press Monsignor Benson always exhibited that shyness which marked his character on other occasions. He would speak when he was spoken to, as

it were. If he were asked he would write on almost any subject: he once, about three years ago, reported a football cup final at the Crystal Palace for the *Daily Mail*. But I have never known Monsignor Benson to write to a newspaper on a matter of personal interest. When he contemplated a tour abroad; when he had been honoured with some distinction, he would let the newspapers find it out for themselves. I have never known him to complain about being misreported in the Press, although his utterances were so voluminous and so rapid that numerous errors must have occurred.

He did not, however, place himself above the Press. His silence was not expressive of assumed superiority. It was a manifestation of his shyness. Whenever he was approached by a journalist he was not only extremely courteous: he was excessively humble. When once I went to interview him by appointment on the matter of the Catholic village scheme which he had outlined in the pages of the *Dublin*, I found him nervously awaiting me and even blushing. He was very deferential to the slight difficulties I raised regarding the idea. He was always open to conviction.

To me Monsignor Benson gave what I think must be a unique privilege. He had been announced to preach the St. Patrick's Day sermon at Soho Square, London. It happened that the sermon was to be delivered just at the time the *Universe* was going to press, and the editor was anxious to secure it for that week's issue. I called on Monsignor Benson at the Carmelite Priory in Kensington (where he spent much of his time in town) and explained the difficulty. He sat me down in his arm-chair, lit a cigarette, took down a volume of notes and preached his sermon to me at an alarming rate. At the end he assured himself that he had done all he could before he allowed me to depart.

Of the Catholic Reading Guild he wrote as follows to Mr. Ambrose Willis:

DEAR MR. WILLIS,—I am delighted to have an opportunity of saying how much I appreciate the work of the Catholic Reading Guild. It appears to me that, at the

present day, the printing press is a very much more powerful influence than the pulpit ; and so far as I know, the C.R.G. in its splendid enterprise and organisation, and its ingenious methods, is doing at least as much as any other body towards using this great force for the Catholic cause. No doubt it is more picturesque and mediaeval to ignore modern methods ; but a society that is only picturesque and mediaeval certainly is not Catholic in the widest sense. Further it must be remembered that the printing press is here anyhow ; and is being steadily used against Revealed Religion in a hundred ways.

The obvious answer to that is the Catholic Reading Guild. With every good wish for its success, yours sincerely,  
R. H. BENSON.

In connection with this it may be allowed to consider Benson's own literary judgment and the advice he gave to others upon writing. His taste in books took him chiefly towards novels. Of novel writers, he undoubtedly best enjoyed Mr. H. G. Wells. This author's use of the mechanical elements in romance "fascinated" him, he said ; and *Kipps*, after a period during which it meant nothing to him, suddenly "fascinated" him too. "I had no idea," he exclaimed after reading it, "that the process of getting drunk could be so delicious." But his real reason for liking Mr. Wells's works was that that author had a perfectly definite end in view and made straight for it and never forgot it. Benson disagreed, probably, with all that Mr. Wells immediately believed in ; but, he *did* believe ; and Benson was quite clear that to believe in any ideal, however contrary to the orthodox one, was far better than agnosticism or aimlessness. Every idealist trod in a curve, which should ultimately bring him round to God. Benson considered that he observed this "reactionary" tendency in Mr. Wells's later books. The proved inadequacy of "natural" ideals was leading him towards the more mystical,

even in politics, as mediaeval feudalism, for instance, is more mystical than modern plutocratic oligarchy.

"Yes," he wrote, "I've read *Marriage*. He is beginning to preach too much. What is the matter with him, I think, is his unconsciousness of the Supernatural. A magnified Natural takes its place in his soul. But he is *fine*, when he writes of what he *does* know."

Much the same instinct, leading him to applaud the man who had a clear goal before him and made remorselessly towards it, explained his enthusiastic praise of Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's romance called *Thompson's Progress*, a source certainly of imperishable joy. That Benson held a creed exactly the opposite to that of the Over-Man, which he expressed on every page of *None other Gods*, could not prevent his wholehearted admiration of that "handbook" (as it has been called) "of the Get-on-or-Get-out School."

Both these writers, too, he thought, were fair. I have mentioned already that Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* appeared to him detestable, not because it revealed an anti-Catholic ideal, but because its misuse of historical material, to support a thesis, was as criminal as ever was, say, Zola's in his *Lourdes*.

"I have also been reading *Westward Ho!* again," he wrote from Cambridge to his mother. "It is a Devilish book—there is no other word for it; and quite full of historical mistakes too; and more biassed and unfair than I had dreamed."

A more reasoned condemnation of *Westward Ho!* appeared in *Everyman*:

[Kingsley] was incapable of seeing the truths for which he had not a temperamental sympathy. It was probably his intense narrowness (which believed itself broadness) that enabled him to write a romance so enthusiastic, so alight with conviction,—so eloquent as to be one of the best

historical novels of the world—historical, that is, only in the sense that its scene is laid in an earlier century than our own. It is a little ironical, however, that one who so greatly loved youth and truth should have succeeded so completely in poisoning the minds of the one by a caricature of the other.

His own books, of course, were frankly pro-Catholic, only, he would argue, he never distorted the evidence or invented it. He never hesitated to discard his own historical work when he came to think it was inadequate. Standing before a pile of his own books he one day flicked aside *The Queen's Tragedy*, and again, *Come Rack, Come Rope*; "I don't like that : I don't like that . . ." and of *Oddsfish* he never could approve. But this was, I think, because he felt their characters did not live, and in novels he looked undoubtedly for living characters immediately after looking for purpose. Far ahead among English novelists he put Meredith, whom he described singularly enough as the impressionist of literature, not, probably, because he does not use infinite labour, but because, once this has been absorbed, you must re-read him, standing back as it were the while and viewing him *en masse*. "He must be read by pages, not paragraphs." Yet though Benson thought Meredith's men and women were giants, and felt "half-sized" beside them, he considered that he never rose to really great heights of tragedy or of anything else, but remained exquisite, especially in his notes and letters. I cannot pretend quite to fuse these judgments, which to some may seem contradictory. Henry James, whom he claimed as English owing to his long residence amongst us and absorption of our ideas, he ranked second ; with his *Turning of the Screw* he ranked Mr. W. B. Maxwell's *In Cotton Wool* as creative of true "awe." He had wept, he owned, and shivered over them. Shall I add up a few more names of books congenial to his taste? "Lucas

Malet's" *The Far Horizon ; The Magnetic North*, by Miss Elizabeth Robins, contained the same foreground of relentless modern realism over which brooded, or through which slowly grew, the transfiguring light of human ideal and, at last, of the mystical Catholic dawn. With these he would put Hardy's *Tess*. "The President of the Immortals" had his Wagnerian grandeur ; and there was a Maeterlinckian gloom about that grim tale. All Miss Mary Cholmondeley's novels, too, he read with absorbed interest. Singular, though, it was that a man who owned he never could like Scott,<sup>1</sup> never George Eliot, and never, I think, the Brontës, should have been so enraptured with Mrs. Mary S. Watt's *Nathan Burke* that he practically declared her to be the only one among contemporary women writers who understood *men*. For Mrs. Watt's admirable book has many, I dare to think, of the qualities of Scott ; and Benson was surely among the readiest to recognise the masculine qualities of Miss Robins's writing.

I think it may safely be said that he liked novels which he found exciting, and these were such as either challenged his ideals, and worked out their own with an accuracy which pleased his logical faculty ; or presented him with human and, especially, psychological problems, a source of interest which for him never ran dry. One exception you must however make. Sex problems he rejected as legitimate topics of discussion without the slightest hesitation, and indeed used expressions concerning such writers as served them up for public consumption so violent as to be libellous. This renders the composition of one of his plays, called *The Brothers*, all the more astonishing. It deals directly and even crudely with this theme.

<sup>1</sup> Scott, he said, put mediocre, bourgeois players and stock company in grandiose scenery, and was tedious.



He was at all times of an extreme generosity in giving literary advice. Examples of his customary methods are to be found, well selected, in Chapter V. of the *Spiritual Letters*.<sup>1</sup> The extreme good sense of the advice he there gives is touched with a certain piquancy when you reflect how much he often needed some similar good counsel, and how impossible it would have been for him to take it !

He would descend to details. "Write St., not S., for Saint ; and *I*, not *one*." "Style perishes if you make use of familiar collocations of words." *Clichés* like "I verily believe," "an indubitable fact," were poison to him. He would, equally, insist on the necessity of general effectiveness, and above all of lucidity. To Miss E. Pearson, the authoress of *Ideals and Realities*, he wrote :

I think your book is charming and beautiful—just the kind of thing to help busy people who can't, or won't, read long connected arguments. I judge always, a great deal, by the general aspect of a page, as to whether it is, so to speak, luminous or not. And your luminousness is not superficial either.

The little biographies, too, are *charming*.

My only criticism is the *title*—much too heavy and *unluminous*, it seems to me, for such an alert book.

Thank you *very* much for sending it me.

Believing that in modern works character-drawing counts for more than plot, he emphasized this point, and wrote to his friend, Mr. R—— H—— :

(1) You can write a Great Deal Better than I thought you could . . . you have the gift of swift and vivid narration, and that is a big gift, and your English is good, though it might be better. . . . (. . .) But your character-drawing is not good. The only man who is a character in the story is D——. The rest simply are not characters. You could not have thought them well out before you began to write.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Letters*, by R. H. Benson to one of his Converts, 1915.

And D—— is only a type ; he isn't an individual !

I don't mean that character-drawing is necessary for money-making : *e.g.* C—— G——, who makes about £20,000 a year (I mean it), never drew one in his life. But he has other qualities, I believe. However, my advice is no good to you about that. (3) Your "story" isn't really good. As soon as I read the title and three or four pages I knew *precisely* what was going to happen. Now, one shouldn't be able to do that. There should be surprise first and conviction afterwards.

I recommend (1) the steady reading of Stevenson for style. (2) The patient reading of Meredith (begin with *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*) for character analysis. (3) . . . (4) Think over your plots and your people MUCH MORE before you begin to write. Let each person be living to you—in his soul—before you write. . . . P.S. . . . Try some plots without so much Catholicism, too.

Not that he neglected the sheer selling importance of a good plot. To Mrs. L. E. Leggatt he wrote of her charming story, *The Accepted Hour*, which appeared in the *Month* for November and December 1912 :

(1) I think the writing and the character analysis exceedingly delicate and charming. I was delighted by them from beginning to end.

(2) But you have handicapped yourself enormously by the plot, which is too "painful" for the average person altogether. One would infinitely have preferred that Celia should die. Of course, the plot is in itself perfectly right and legitimate. I think that you could relieve the situation by a short prologue describing your acquaintance with Celia five years after her husband's death—reassuring the public, so to speak, that she did not turn bitter.

If you added this small prologue you could leave the end as abrupt as it is ; but an "intimate" sentence or two here and there throughout would keep the reassurance of the prologue in the readers' minds.

He was, too, ready to enjoy, correct, and contribute a careful preface to simple books for children. I will specify

Mrs. Sophie Maude's *Child Countess*, and *John and Joan*, and to more serious psychological studies, like Miss Mary Samuel Daniel's very striking novel *Choice*, in which the psychology of conversion — his favourite topic — and the place in it of the will were so deeply involved. I think I may say that of all to whom he gave his literary help, none promised (in his judgment) higher excellence than did this lady. Of her novel he wrote to her :

I have read the chapters carefully and with a great deal of interest. First, I would say that you have been entirely reverent and sympathetic. No Catholic could possibly be anything but touched and moved by your sympathy. I would not alter a word. It is true, not only to Catholicism *as seen by such a soul as Joan*, but it is true also to the mentality of such a soul as Joan. Of course, to my mind, the argument is inevitable, viz. that a soul like Joan *would* do exactly what you make her do ; come and look, and see a great deal, and like it, and love it, and say good-bye. Because, so far as I can see from these chapters, Joan is ready to sacrifice *everything* EXCEPT HERSELF. She will sacrifice position, money, hope, . . . but not herself. She is deep enough to get right down face to face with the paradox, "Except a man lose himself he cannot find himself," but she is not strong enough to embrace it. She will speak of "being true to herself," and she will be true to HER SELF. . . . But that is not the ultimate conquest. The ultimate conquest is to risk being untrue to oneself, in the sublime act of faith involved in being true to God. And then, and not till then, does one find oneself, and discover that in denying self one has saved self.

Forgive all this which you haven't asked. . . . As for the book, I give it my unconditional Imprimatur !!! God bless you.—Yours,

R. H. B.

I have quoted these letters, not because the "advice" contained in them is so very original, or covers the whole field, or that I feel myself competent to criticise its justice, but in order to show how thoroughly he entered, emotion-

ally and critically, into what he was asked to appreciate, and with what infinite courtesy and care he responded to appeals for help, even, in many instances, from strangers, and how he combined encouragement with honesty.<sup>1</sup>

It is rather amusing to find how markedly views differ as to his power of taking, on his side, criticism. Usually his humility is extolled: "He took my remarks as simply as a child." "His docility was wonderful." That is true; but probably what these far from intimate acquaintances were seeing was not his humility but his courtesy. That was always infinite; and the less well he knew the critic, naturally the more gracefully he accepted the criticism. As a matter of fact, when he knew people well, he let them see that he kept to his own opinion, under criticism, very seriously. He kicked and fretted till he could explain himself; if he saw he was defeated, he argued hotly, quite undisguisedly at times, against his real conviction with a kind of petulant charm, till the critic had made good his point; then he laughed and gave in suddenly.

But often, again, he was quite annoyed.

"You'll have trouble with your critical faculty," he once said menacingly to a friend. "It's the best thing I've got," she announced. "But are you sure it's right?" "I know it is; it acts like the needle of a compass." "Can you be sure? I have an ear for music, but I don't know whether a tune is a good tune or not." "But you know whether it's *in* tune." After a pause he replied, looking about for a new weapon, "I can't even be sure about my own writing. For instance, I don't always know when a

<sup>1</sup> It entered, however, into his ethical system, as reviewer, that you might bestow especial praise upon a book because it was written by your friend. His painstaking sincerity was incidentally revealed, by the fact (Mr. J. E. C. Bodley gratefully recognised) that he would write two quite different, carefully thought out reviews on a book in different journals.

certain sort of sentiment in my book is rancid." "So," exclaimed the infallible critic, impaling him, "so I have sometimes thought." The discussion collapsed, but for consolation she confessed to him that she had been in danger of setting him up as beyond all criticism—a fetish. Instead, cognisant of this sin, she decided to set him up as a—"Ninepin," he flashed, taking the word out of her mouth. "Exactly," she replied; and they laughed, and never quarrelled again on this point.

After all, it would be a pity to eliminate from Benson's mobile features the lines of *petulance* into which they could fall. Undoubtedly, in certain circumstances, if he was not allowed to dominate, he got very flushed and worried. But it had, even so, something of the schoolboy about it. "I'm glad I've succeeded in making you angry, anyway!" he once cried, having at last ruffled the serenity of his disputant, though without convincing her.

## II

The offices of Confessor and of Director are by no means identical. Often, they may best be separate. I do not mean to say more than this word about Father Benson as a Confessor, that in the Confessional, as at the Altar, he laid aside all of his personality, so to say, which might suggest that *his* ministration, rather than the Sacrament, was what his penitent wanted. The quick intuition, the decisive word, were always there of course; he never could be dull, he never would be bored. It is in studying him as Director that it will best be seen how far removed he was alike from rigour and from softness: he compromised no ideal, while he never, in the Confessional at any rate, was harsh. His

was no cloying sweetness ; he was not stiff, he was not perfunctory, and of course he talked no cant.

He insisted that even in direction the personality of the Director should intrude as little as was possible. Here he considered a marked difference to exist between what the Anglican system made desirable, and what a true sacerdotalism could render quite unnecessary.

"In the case of the Church of England," he wrote, "there enters in very largely the idea that a clergyman is a kind of cultivated friend, whose friendship and interest may be demanded by any of his people. He is educated in a way corresponding to that idea. But with us a priest is not necessarily that. He is just a minister of God's sacramental grace, an interceder and sacrificer, and a teacher, and is educated with that object alone. . . . Many priests have not had the same sort of education, in a general way, that Anglican clergymen have. They have so much 'technique' to learn, that it is almost impossible to combine the two. If you had wanted [him] to administer a necessary sacrament, you would have found that he would have gone through fire and water to do it. . . . His only importance is that he is *God's* minister."

Even an unsympathetic priest, deplorable as was the betrayal of his mission which his churlishness, or other ill qualities, implied, could not *matter* really—his priesthood remained.

A priest should, on the whole, sin by defect—not of accessibility, but of volubility.

I am rather glad that the priest does not talk much. That sounds rather brutal ; but what I mean is, that I think that you are one of the people who flourish better on broad principles than on details. I sincerely think that your spiritual life is an *intelligent* one, and that you are able to apply broad principles better than other people can apply them for you. I believe it is good for all of us to have someone look into our details now and then, and classify and discuss them ; but I do not think you would

prosper if you had minute direction every time you went to confession.

If, however, a soul did put itself under his direction, he expected it, while there, to obey him ; else, he offered it full liberty to withdraw itself from his care.

Thus, having urged a penitent not to abandon the difficult, nobler course :

I ask you as strongly as I can, NOT to snatch the sacrifice off the Altar just because the fire that GOD has sent down on it burns !

He followed up this letter, and her continued hesitation, in these words :

LENT [1912], NEW YORK.

MY DEAR CHILD,—I have had your letter. . . . It comes to this. Will you do as I have *urged* you to do [. . .] ; or, will you let go of high spiritual life, . . . and be a “good Catholic.” I shall not resent it in the slightest—it seems absurd even to say this !—but your letter makes it necessary. I notice from small indications in your letters recently that you think I have been guiding you wrong ; in fact, you practically say so. Very good ; very likely I have. But I don’t see it ; and, not seeing it, I don’t propose to change. But your soul is your own—“No man may deliver his brother.” So, if you think that, you must, in conscience, choose somebody else. *But will you first read Fr. Faber’s “Growth in Holiness”—the chapter on Directors,* and the choice of a Director—and then decide ? He says there expressly that under certain circumstances a change of director is necessary. If you think that those circumstances are yours, then you MUST have someone else.

But if you have me, *you must do as I say.* This is very terse and sharp ; but it isn’t disagreeably sharp, I hope ! But it is the cross-roads, and you must choose.

He would spontaneously recommend Confessors other than himself without the slightest hint of jealousy :

. . . If you want a Confessor whom you can always find—or nearly always—who is capable of being absolutely

*Brutal*, and who spares himself no more than he spares others—I can give you his name. But I would sooner know *for certain* first that you are not at all a Sensation-seeker. . . .

His penitent expressed anxiety. He reassured her thus :

You're *utterly wrong* about Fr. X., though you're right about some external details. He isn't like that. He'll be absolutely brutal to people who aren't *real*, or who fuss, or are foolish. But to *real* people he's entirely different. The nearest approach to a St. Teresa living an ordinary domestic life in the world—a woman of Fire and Patience—whom I have ever met is the result of his training. Certainly he loathes Shams ; but that's all.

I told you of him quite deliberately and knowingly ; and I still tell you that he's the right man. I wish you wouldn't bother about "views." . . . You have a much larger job on hand—the real conversion of your own will.

Please go to him—let us say once a month—and remind him that I wished you to come ; and that you have taken two hours to come, and all the rest. Let him stamp on your views—if you really feel it's necessary to state them. But I wish you would go to him for six months at any rate. If you feel then that he's not the man, I will give in. . . .

Yes, I do think you are "missing loveliness," and, above all, missing a vigorous, keen atmosphere like Davos air. But of course if you prefer to go on muggily in the valleys—well, it's not sinful ; and it's no one's loss except yours. No, I'm not being sarcastic. I'm dispassionately stating what I believe to be true. Forgive this scrawl, but I'm desperate with letters.

This does not mean that he could not resent what he considered perverse or unjust very fiercely. He wrote to one who objected to his advice as follows :

*January 15 [1912].*

. . . You took violent offence at some plain advice I gave you in response to your asking spiritual counsel : since that time I have never again written all that I have thought, as I should have done, and do, to others. I have always been careful *not* to comment freely on what you



have told me, since it seemed to me that you would resent, and think unfriendly, any such plain advice as I should give to other people. Instead of this, I have tried, in the midst of an enormous correspondence, to keep up simply friendly relations, since, plainly, you did not want anything else. [She had, however, taken offence at shortness of letters and in many ways "insulted" him. The "greatest insult of all" was to return him his own letter.]

And now you write a very mild letter of regret, demanding "forgiveness as a Christian," and trying to justify yourself at the same time.

What am I to think of all this? [. . .]

It is plain to me that, hitherto at any rate, you have not thought of friendship as I think of it. Friends understand one another, in my idea; they make the best of one another, not the worst; they do not put the *worst* construction on one another's words or actions, but the best; above all, they *never* wilfully try to hurt one another's feelings: they think of one another, not of themselves always.

It seems to me that you owe a considerably more humble and abject apology to me before you can dream of claiming friendship again.

As regards forgiveness, naturally I forgive you in an honest and Christian way; otherwise I could not go to the altar. But you owe me a good deal more real humility and sorrow, before anything resembling personal friendship can ever exist again.

Nearly two years later, the same acquaintance had resented his refusal to write a preface to a book of hers—he was asked, he said, to write too many. He answered:

For myself (I do not defend my view: I only say it is mine), when I am annoyed with a person I am silent; and if I cannot get over my annoyance or my disapproval, I leave them alone.

Over and over again, however, his correspondents reveal that in him their temperament, at any rate, has found what it had needed. "You always understand about everything," was a pathetic tribute of John Henry Newman's

little sister to her brother ; " You always make me happy when I am uncomfortable ; " and " You always answer everything I ask you," is a phrase characteristic of the letters Hugh Benson would receive ; or, " No word or suggestion of yours has ever done anything but help me ; " or, again, " This is the first time in my life that anyone has really *met* my thought." He did more than meet it : he led it. " After talking with him," a clever woman wrote, " one felt that one's brain had been taken out for a brisk walk." Therefore it must be recognised at once that the submission he required was not one of personal adoration. He hated worship. It may be true, as one correspondent writes to me, that at crises in life we need to meet, or perhaps must always possess, some one person whom we shall place outside of criticism. That may be so, but rather because, for our own soul's health, we refuse to criticise them than because we believe that this fellow-human is intrinsically above all criticism.

Any popular Director, it may be supposed, has suffered from the more indiscreet among his penitents calling him a Saint. They do this, presumably, partly because they really think he is one ; more often, because instinct tells them that it is more flattering to have a Saint preoccupied with their soul's welfare than an ordinary person. A sense of humour will prove his sure salvation ; for this goes along with the discernment of disproportion, and humility is little else than the appreciation of proportion and its acceptance for Christ's sake. But when, as in periods of mental fatigue, the sense of humour may be in abeyance, a sensitive soul may feel its own canonisation to be a vulgar insult.

Monsignor Benson was especially exposed both to exhilarating and to depressed periods, such as the aftermath

of neuralgia or more general reactions after nervous excitement, which rendered it acutely angering.

He once wrote irritably :

Please don't be dramatic, and talk about "you good people," "not knowing what poor devils have to go through." And don't be sarcastic. It makes no sort of impression on me. You know perfectly well that there is *no* division between "good people" and "poor devils." We are all poor devils. But the people who say so loud generally don't think they are. They are the Publicans who say, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as this Pharisee," and that instant they become Pharisees of the modern sort.<sup>1</sup>

When, however, he found himself exalted from the category of "you good people" to the rank of Saint, he struck back vigorously.

He wrote from Cambridge, on June 15, 1908 :

*Never, never* again must you even hint to me such things as you hint in your paper—which I shall destroy. You don't seem to understand that the only thing I attempt to pride myself on, is that I am extremely sorry for my sins, and that I am a Bad Hat who knows it. . . .

Now then, don't even approach making me say that again.

Finished.

*Postscript.*—I mean my first paragraph perfectly seriously. If you hint at such stuff again, I shall be extraordinarily angry and give you "something to cry for."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He was pleased with this conceit, and used it more than once. "I am not aware," he wrote in 1909, "that our Lord wasted even one word on Herod or Caiaphas or the Roman soldiers. He called the weary and dissatisfied who were willing to *suffer*; not the complacent sinners who went about with their heads in the air, saying, "I thank God I am not as these Pharisees." Lovers of Mrs. Meynell's poetry will not fail to recall her exquisite epigram.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Benson had a quite definite opinion of the value of "consecrated bullying." He once announced to a friend the appalling dogma that it was impossible to do anything with a woman until you had made her cry. This same friend was once privileged to behold the operation in process, and to watch a sullen servant maid systematically reduced to tears, until, realising who was master, she was converted to docility. In *Loneliness* he says of Father Franklin,

Two days later he launched this thunderbolt :

You have done it again, at once. The only possible explanation is that you think me hypocritical and mock-modest. This is the sort of compliment I won't stand for one instant. It is not "good form," even on the lowest ground, to imply that kind of thing. It makes me sick. I had hoped you would read between the lines of my very mild remonstrance. It is not in the least "all right." When I write "finished" I mean "finished."

Kindly send me a brief apology in one sentence *on a post-card*, and do not ever refer to it again. I shall not. All right about the other things.—Yours sincerely,

R. HUGH BENSON.

P.S.—The only palliation I can see is that you are not yet a Catholic, and do not therefore realise the horror and repugnance one feels at having such things even hinted. Please take it on my word that it is so, until you see it for yourself.

I say "a post-card," because explanations will be worse than useless. I think you can honestly say "I am sorry" for the simple reason that you have really offended me. When anyone says that to me simply and curtly, I accept it, and put away the offence entirely. My silence will mean that.

The simplicity he insisted on as fundamental in all spiritual relationship was, then, a simplicity towards God.

"It seems to me," he wrote as long ago as 1901, "that 'childlikeness' is the secret of everything—of faith and life : and the key to all holiness . . . there are innumerable virtues springing out of it—realisation of the supernatural—absorption, in the right sense, in one's affairs—or intensity of purpose—a terror of Sin : and an absolute taking for

S.J., that he was "a great ladies' confessor, which means that he could be harder than it is possible to imagine. Tears, even, simply made no difference to him at all; he simply waited until they were over, and then repeated his last remark with any necessary addition that had occurred to him." The suitability of these processes we will not venture to discuss. Needless to say, of the essential chivalry, delicacy of feeling, modesty and simplicity which marked Benson's attitude towards women, there never has been the slightest question.

granted the means of grace. So many souls seem to lose their faith and then hold on Our Lord by continually fretting about the grounds of faith, and the reasons for reliance on His Providence."

This element of childlikeness was retained by him in every department of the spiritual life. It was a foundation on which all humanity should rest; a method by which the soul should govern its struggle towards God, and the lasting concomitant even of the sublimest relations of achieved sanctity.

With simplicity and obedience, courage was to go. He was no easy-going guide. "You treat me in such a *dreadful* fashion." . . . "Don't *you* be angry with me. . . ." "You give me, not a stone, but such hard crusts, . . ." are sentences I take almost at random from letters written to him. Hard he could often be in his demeanour, and hard in his advice, when he thought a soul capable of supporting it. He said that a Carmelite vocation had been once revealed to a soul simply by an appalling snub administered to her.

"Yes," he wrote to another, "I agree that your troubles are real enough. But all the better. . . . I think that the Authorities are pleased sometimes 'to give us something to cry for.' . . . Most of us cry without anything. . . . And I think that the insane desire one has sometimes to bang and kick grumblers and peevish persons, is a Divine instinct. . . . Ergo. . . . Therefore thank Them that you HAVE something to cry for. One doesn't get far without it."

He was frankly brutal at times and uttered downright oracles. "You," he said to one penitent, "must go and live six months with *dull* people . . . if possible in the suburbs." To another, he enjoined the duty of wearing shabby clothes. One correspondent has written to me that she felt him to be a prophet rather than a director, so would he

"see" you, not as you were, but, disconcertingly, as you would be later on. One penitent was faced with the alternative of giving up her nursing, or of always missing Sunday Mass. "Go to the workhouse rather," he ordered. The penitent advanced down this austere path, and became "a very happy cook." Later, she promised to go on pilgrimage to Lisieux. When the hour arrived, she found that to do so would involve a forfeiture of an important £20. "What," Father Benson asked, "does Our Lord care for £20?" She went, and "a man's soul was saved by that pilgrimage." In the course of her training to be cook, she had to go abroad. She called to wish her director good-bye, and hoped for some word of congratulation for her long period of prayer and renunciation. All he said was: "You have never yet entered into the Kingdom within. You have taken the Kingdom *without*, within." A sermon in church followed, somewhat contemptuous of the "Average Catholic," with whom she felt herself to be identified. Profoundly depressed, she related her spiritual vicissitudes and direction to a foreign priest. "It is true," he answered, "that you have never yet entered upon the interior life," but, he added, with no untender irony, "*vous avez déjà fait votre noviciat.*" The priest gave her further counsel; and it was God Himself, Monsignor Benson afterwards said, Who had sent her to him, and that she was to follow his advice not only then, but in all to which it might, in the future, lead. Yet in all this, as the same correspondent said, he sat with curious lightness to his own oracles.

He had a way when you asked his advice of saying "that's my contribution"—a "take-it-or-leave-it" atmosphere. There was such a difference between this and the "*Vous ferez ceci*" or "*celà*"—the authority of the French priest which makes a soul feel they are on the right lines.

To other souls this would present itself in a different light.

"He never seemed to be in doubt for a second," one writes to me, "about anything. He acted always spontaneously in everything, as if he were but the agent of some Higher Power. At first I used to think he could not possibly have had time to form his judgment, so rapid was his action. He couldn't bear one to disagree—it hampered him and in no way influenced him—he was always carrying out some plan based on some principle which occasionally had the appearance of being unreasonable. His dominant personality impressed itself most deeply on our feminine sex, and yet I think he understood young men better than women and liked them best."

When, therefore, he took a soul in hand he would begin by clearing away its superfluities even of devotion. "Too many prayer-books," he would say. "Too much spiritual reading." "Trust to circumstances : until it's clear God wants you where you're not, take it He wants you where you are." He would give a simple "rule," but expected that it should be well adhered to. Above all, "Don't make yourself a nuisance : accept invitations : dress prettily : mask your 'charity' with plenty of humour ; and," he once added, his eyes twinkling, "try to make your heart as big as yourself."

Having established contact, so to say, he proceeded with the detaching of the heart from such human bonds as kept it back from God.

(1) *Detachment*. It seems to me (1) that we must put God not only as the "First," but as the "Only" : nothing else must be on the same plane at all. (2) We cannot do this without passing through the stage of actually sacrificing for His sake things good in themselves. It is only when we have reached real interior detachment through these means that we can enjoy His gifts safely. It is surely a fallacy to say "this thing is good : therefore

I may use it to the full"—a fallacy, since it omits the vital premiss that *we* are not good. We are spiritual invalids until God is our All; and must live like invalids—viz., *not* using good things to the full.

So with friendships: until you feel truly that no human loss could possibly shake your hold on God, we have to have what *seems like* a sort of heartlessness.

And to another:

MY DEAR CHILD IN CHRIST,—You have not yet “denied YOURSELF.” You have denied many things *to* yourself: you have made great sacrifices, &c., but you haven’t yet yielded *without reserve*. Now those people are always unhappy. Read “The Hound of Heaven” again and again. As soon as you yield entirely you will be happy.

What *does* it matter what people say or think? *Dicunt. Quid dicunt? Dicant!*

This was a favourite phrase of his. So was that other: *Bang the door*. He wrote to a penitent:

You haven’t, I think, any idea of *interior* discipline. Exactly as one bangs the door on certain actions and certain words, so one must bang the door on certain thoughts—e.g. Leslie Stephen. (I’ve read him. He’s silly. He doesn’t understand what the Catholic religion is.)

Obviously, however, he’s too strong for your spiritual digestion. Therefore, burn him at once; and don’t read him, or anything like him, again. And don’t think him. Bang the door. . . .

“Get down,” he used to say, “beneath all the vices and virtues, to the very heart of things—to that little hard lump called self, and *smash it*. Think of yourself as you would in your most censorious mood think of somebody else. Now isn’t self contemptible? Doesn’t it spoil everything? Give it no mercy.”

“I never realised my absorption in my interests was a fault,” his penitent replied, “till, the other day, you preached about women being so selfish. Now I see.” “*Thank God!*” he almost shouted. And he proceeded to discuss with her



the number and the length of the visits she should pay—"once in three months—decide before you go how long they are to be—a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes—and stick to it. And *be interested* in what they talk about." So too with another he arranged the expenditure of her allowance in such detail that at last 2½*d.* was left for postage. "Never mind," he said, "don't write more than two letters and one postcard a week."

Thus seriously did he envisage the business of self-discipline. "Don't mistake 'God is Love' for 'God is Good Nature.' Love is terrible and stern." "Disregard scruples—*fiercely*." *Fierce* is a favourite adjective of his.

Perhaps more insight, however, will be gained by a series of extracts quoted from the letters written by him to one who was suffering from the drug habit. The letters began when he was still young, and were perhaps rather violent. He counselled, for instance, the sudden and complete breaking off of the habit, and indeed possessed himself of the syringe and extracted promises and the like. I think that later on he would have recognised this as rash.

"Perhaps you will think you are going to die," he wrote. "Well, then, die."<sup>1</sup> She was to go to a nursing home :

You need not fear that I shall yield one *inch*, when you are once in the Home ; I would a thousand times sooner you died of exhaustion and misery, than that you went back to the world uncured.

At the beginning this patient was not a Catholic, and she passed through the alternating religious moods proper to one in her condition. Father Benson at that period did

<sup>1</sup> More gentle was a word spoken to another sick woman : "Continue in this path," he said, after mapping out her spiritual way in practical tones, "unless," and his face was transfigured, "unless the best of all happens and Our Lord takes you to Himself."

nothing but encourage her. She was, moreover, to follow as best she could the direction of her spiritual adviser. Father Benson did not wish to interfere until it was clear she was looking for instruction concerning the Catholic Church.

"Don't be dismayed," he continues later, "about belonging to 'neither one thing nor the other.' You belong to God, which is the point. The Church will follow.

(1) Spiritualism could not conceivably cure you.

(2) If it could, it could only be by diabolical power. The Devil gives nothing for nothing."

He urged her to adopt such of the exterior practices of Catholicism as non-Catholics might, while yet not officially received, but under instruction only. She resisted, and he answered :

You mustn't call God's Truth Red Tape. Absolution = admittance to the Body of Christ. Reflect on that. . . .

You seem to treat the Church like a religious club, an association of pious persons who have privileges and more or less keep the rules—and that it doesn't matter very much whether you keep them or not. That is sheer High Church Anglicanism. You have to get it into your head that she is the BODY OF INCARNATE GOD ON EARTH, AND THAT THEREFORE HER VOICE IS HIS VOICE.

At last she became a Catholic, and he felt himself able to deal with waywardness more firmly. He thought, by now, that gentleness with one in her psychic state was useless : he would try his famous course of "sheer brutality," and prayed for her some "really grave adversity," or even the workhouse :

At present you prefer your ease : and as long as you do that I do not think you will ever be cured. But, as I say, I haven't quite given up hope : because every now and then you show real sincerity and real endeavour. Honestly, I don't know which side is going to win. But

please take it for granted that I cannot again even try to make it easy. That [is] simply useless. If I saw you in really hard conditions, responding—I should do my best again.

At times his convert railed at the Christians to whom, from a faith more alien than mere Protestantism, she had come :

I notice that you threaten in a veiled way, all through your letter, to become a Christian Scientist. But you don't quite realise that to a Catholic that sort of threat is simply contemptible. The Church, really, will survive. The only question is, whether you will.

Please don't be absurd about "Christians." Remember, free-will is free-will. If a person insists on going to hell, not even God Almighty can stop him. There are enough people whom help can help, who take all the time. One can't go on bothering with people who won't use it. You were like that a while ago.

Please don't get back to that old bit of rubbish about "Christians." Christians won't stand everything, any more than Almighty God will. They are not weak-minded sentimentalists, and don't even wish to be.

. . . You really must not be absurd in details even. It all weakens character ; and that is Death and Burial in your case. If you could but take hold of your weaknesses in *small* parts—(to be frank, you have done so in a good many of them)—you would soon get hold of the Big One.

Two supplementary extracts will show how perfectly Hugh Benson knew when to refuse to "stand everything." When he thinks apology is due, he offers it exquisitely :

I am really sorry for not having sent the book—(here it is)—that was sheer stupidity. My excuse is that this is my fifth week of bad neuralgia every day. There ! I have said it. Of course I've got to stick it out ; and I'm aware it's exceedingly good for the soul ; but it makes me forgetful, when one has to do all one's work exactly as usual and write letters for about two hours every day, on the top of all else.

But he was not meek, when meekness, he felt, was weakness :

What is the use of writing me offensive and rude notes ? I left a message in the sacristy that I had to catch a train. Kindly remember that I make my engagements at least several days beforehand.

The whole thing, as I have told you repeatedly, depends on no one but yourself. If you choose to suffer pain, you can be cured ; if you don't, you won't. . . . Finally, please remember in future that I cannot be suddenly interrupted in the middle of a carefully pre-arranged series of engagements, unless it is a *vital* matter. Yours, obviously, was not. . . . Last of all, I refuse to answer any more rude letters.

Of course I can't "treat it as if it hadn't happened," because it has happened, and you don't seem nearly as miserable about it as you ought. To fail *wilfully*, as you say, shows that the will isn't yet converted. . . . The fact is that you don't always, with your whole will, really *wish* to be cured. You wish to dawdle on, and get as much pleasure as possible, without forfeiting more of self-respect, and the respect of others, than you need. Isn't that the fact ? Very well : then the remedy lies in yourself. As soon as you entirely wish to be cured, you are cured.

Often, in moods of despondency, she felt she could not go to Mass, and could not go to confession, or at least make a full confession, save to him :

It will be *impossible* for you always to make your confessions to me. You ought to go very frequently—weekly—to the sacraments. You will find in the Church how little personal matters go for. Remember priests are professionals, not amateurs.

Your news as to not going to Mass because you "felt it would not help you" is exactly the kind of thing that retards progress indefinitely. Surely you see by now that what is wrong with you *all round* is your allowing Feeling to dictate to the Will ! Every single time you do that—in any shape or form—you are hindering your own victory.

Consider. You are approaching the Catholic Church as a child, not as a critic. You see that she is, at the

lowest estimate, the greatest Mother and Physician of Souls in existence. The very centre and heart of her Life is the Mass; she says that all her strength and Divinity lies hidden there. All this you know, implicitly at least. And yet because one morning YOU, MISS X. Y., don't FEEL that it will HELP YOU, you don't go. Good God!

Please regard that picture for a minute or two.

I'm sorry about your not going to Mass. That is a symptom of elementariness. St. Peter when he was elementary said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." When he was mature, after an appalling sin, he jumped overboard to get to Jesus. . . . Do you see?

Don't you see that down in your heart there's a hard bit of pavement, unbroken. . . .

Finally, if only to show that not all his direction was on this tragic plane, let me quote a postcard, sent enclosed to a friend in an envelope, which explains itself:

Forgive me : but I side  
with your correspondent !  
I do really. I mustn't say more on a card.  
Dūs te ben. Ora pro me.

R H B

I see now you've

I know we don't  
understand about shop-  
ping, &c. : therefore we say  
" why couldn't she  
have done it before ? "

enclosed an envelope. I do  
*really* think he was right. A  
man loathes his wife's absence :  
and above all, to have an  
extension suddenly sprung on  
him. It is INFURIATING.

To instruct converts for reception into the Church was of course a great part of Fr. Benson's apostolate. He received a considerable number himself, and handed even

more on to other priests, either from motives of convenience or of courtesy, or because he felt they were more capable of dealing with certain special difficulties than he was, as in the case of a well-known writer with whose socialistic beliefs Benson felt he could not deal with sufficient sympathy. He wrote long letters, the paragraphs numbered and the arguments marshalled with utmost text-book terseness ; he gave interviews, more powerful still, with the flashing play of intelligence and quick imaginative grasp and incisive voice to help out the written page which "could not answer back." Not that he failed to recommend books. Until days of disaster came he urged his friends to read "everything of Fr. Tyrrell you can lay your hands on" ; Bishop Bellord's *Meditations on Dogma* ; Mother Loyola's wise and moving books ; Fr. Baker's *Saucta Sophia* ; Joly's *Les Saints*, were favourites of his. But above all, of Mr. C. S. Devas's *Key to the World's Progress* and Miss B. A. Baker's *Modern Pilgrim's Progress* he cannot speak too often or too highly. In 1910 he wrote a preface to the latter book, and winged its keen shafts with that emotion which (for some tastes) its pages lack. A truer criticism is, perhaps, that its authoress illuminates the road she travelled with so vivid a light that no other eye can fail to see it ; she herself, however, walked in it by a light that was incommunicable, a "light invisible," if you will, whereby of course each soul that goes by faith must individually move. Now is it not true to say that somehow, after reading what Fr. Benson writes, souls find that for them the incommunicable light is dawning ? Not that "in his light," precisely, they "see light" ; but that with the oil of his lamp their own has been replenished and their wick prepared to catch the diviner spark ?

I do not wish at all to tabulate the arguments by which

Fr. Benson thought that the Catholic position could be proved or recommended, nor to offer evidence of the way he dealt with anxious souls otherwise than as may best further elucidate his own. And I will not try to indicate the controversial part of his dealing with them so much as his own few guiding principles, moral quite as much as intellectual. They may be summed up as follows :

We must assume that God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

All religion is, in consequence, *incarnational*. That is, it is apparent that once the Word has been made flesh, the spiritual element will have a material coefficient throughout.

This religion is not for the expert or scholar, but for the fool, the average man, the world. Hence the need of a living, infallible voice if Christ's coming were not to be nugatory. He came to give a Message ; if it had any importance, means for its right interpretation must be provided.

With regard to "institutions," I have already said enough when speaking of his own conversion. He honestly believed, and constantly said, that he was grateful to and loved the Anglican Establishment, but this was because he remembered with emotion the excellent Anglicans he had known, or, even more, the graces that God had given him on the occasion of its ministrations, since he was doing the best he knew, and since those very graces, he held, were weaning him from it. His letters recur constantly to this, that not the *fact* of the graces received through Anglican

<sup>1</sup> Benson knew quite well that the detailed "apologetic" of this was not his "line." He would refer inquirers to experts ; though it was essential to his general scheme of belief that expert assistance was not necessary. *When the will had turned the soul's eye towards the light*, Christ shone sufficiently for its illumination. In His light, certainly, man was to "see light."

rites, but the legitimacy of the *mode* of their conveyance, must be by the enlightened Catholic denied. But as regarded the Anglican Church itself, viewed as an institution claiming to be Christ's Church or part of it, he would display a perfectly remorseless spirit of irony, and scourged her ministers, methods, and dialectic, with every whip of small cords his armoury contained. This distinction, then, must be more carefully remembered by his readers than it was by himself, else he will seem inconsistent; and his letters, though not his books, will appear to blow hot and cold in rapid alternation. Moreover, here especially, Hugh passed with an extremely rapid oscillation from mood to mood, and it entirely depended upon his mood whether he focused his attention on the person with whom he was dealing, or upon the institution to which that person belonged.

I have felt it simplest, therefore, to quote no controversial platitudes and the like as though for their own sake; but, by giving rather full extracts from four groups of letters, to illustrate the attitude he took towards four characters fairly representative, I think, of those who seek admission to the Church.

Here then, first, is a brief series of letters which will illustrate his dealings with a soul called by God to follow the path of simpler intellectual conviction towards the Church.

All Catholic doctrine, practically, was admitted by this High Church lady save the authority of the Petrine See.

*July 5 [1906].*

Indeed I understand the difficulty and the trouble of mind that you are going through.

Briefly, this is my advice. Our Lord either did or did not intend to build His Church upon Peter, in the sense of the Papal claims—I mean He either did, or did not, lay down as a condition of membership in the Visible Church, membership with the Bishop of Rome. Absolutely every-



thing else is secondary to this. Anglican Orders, Communion in "one kind, . . ." all individual doctrines alike are comparatively unimportant compared with this. In the same manner all other motives for making one's submission are secondary to the one motive of desiring to be in union with the Vicar of Heaven.

Therefore I should recommend you to isolate, as it were, this one essential doctrine, and give your whole attention to it. When other considerations come in—*e.g.* the hesitation of your director—your desire to be in union with a Church that appeals to your emotions, your shrinking from severing old ties—dismiss them as you would dismiss any other temptation.

Now in order to deal with this question properly, I should advise your making a novena to the Holy Ghost; especially asking in your prayers that your motives may be purified, that all self-deception may be removed, and that God may send out His Light and Truth. Use great confidence towards God, remember that He is a Father before He is a Judge. Do not put yourself during this novena under external influences of either side—I mean, do not go to Communion in the Church of England, and if possible do not even go to church; and, on the other hand, read no controversy, and do not go to any of our churches or talk to our people. For reading during this time I should recommend the Gospels and the Acts—noticing quietly the kind of position which St. Peter occupies, and trying to see what that position means, apart from prejudice. I have written, I am afraid, rather brusquely, as I am under a great pressure of work; but I hope you will believe how much I am interested, and how much I hope you will find peace.

The painful interspace had by now been reached, so familiar to those who watch souls try to accomplish their full evolution, in which the brain seems somehow sodden with argument, and the will too tired to choose.

*October 19 [1906].*

. . . The one thing I can say is that God does not expect you to take such a step as making your submission, until you see it is your duty to do so. . . .

May I suggest to you that you should read the Gospels once more, writing down the words Our Lord said to St. Peter and His actions towards him ; and the same with regard to St. John ? If one will do that without prejudice, simply, it seems to me that it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that St. John stood in an unique *personal* relation to Our Lord, and St. Peter in an unique *official* relation.

With regard to your other point, namely, that at present it seems cowardly to leave the Church of England just when "it is so necessary to maintain her Catholicity," that surely is assuming too much. One of the vital points is, Is the Church of England Catholic at all ? If she is truly a part of the Catholic Church, in a way that the Wesleyans are not, OF COURSE nothing must induce you to leave her at all. But our claim is that she is not ; and that any attempt to "maintain her Catholicity" is really to obscure God's simple scheme of salvation. I should like you to fix your mind, without anxiety or prejudice, on that one point. What is Our Lord's intention as to the constitution of His Church ? Did He mean it to be Visible and One ? If so, must it not be Visibly One ?

I know well that it is hard looking at it from your side. But on this side it is so absolutely simple, obvious, and convincing.

A little later :

November 6, 1906.

. . . One must see God's hand in all circumstances. As you say, and as I imply in my book, no two souls follow exactly the same road to the City of Peace. But, as I also said, the path does not take one actually *into* the City—only up to the gates. The final entrance can only be through faith : and at that point one leaves all else.

The question then to ask yourself is not "Does the path I have followed justify my entering ?" (because it cannot), but "Having followed a path made for me by God's Providence, do I now *believe* that this is the City of Peace ?" If so, you must enter. If not, not. *Mere* dissatisfaction with the Church of England can only be a path. It is not positive Faith in the Church of Rome.

In the same way, you may not be able to answer

arguments against the Church, any more than, presumably, the disciples could answer arguments against the Divinity of Our Lord; yet they believed. "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt."

A little later, and this lady's director himself submitted to the Catholic Church. A great barrier was taken from her path.

Now, I think, you may take it that this new circumstance is a withdrawal of a difficulty, rather than an actual motive for your own submission. I congratulate you most sincerely on this great happiness. You will find, of course, that the human side of the Church is human and therefore imperfect, and at the same time you will find more and more that the Divine side is indeed divine.

It was not long after this that the Catholic gates were opened for her too.

In the following extracts from a long correspondence, which lasted from days before Hugh Benson's own conversion until his death, a more subjective note is struck. It is, too, if I may say so, one of the very few portions of his correspondence in which the genuine note of personal tenderness is heard.

Here, then, he had to deal with an inquirer who, feeling that there always *might* be more to be found out in the way of evidence for or against the Roman claim, felt in consequence that she personally might never have studied the question *quite enough*. This opened up despairing avenues with no visible end to them, and these Father Benson anxiously tried to barricade.

"You say," he wrote soon after his own conversion—"you say, it seems to me, that unless you can go to Oxford or London and read at the Bodleian one never can say one has gone into the matter thoroughly. . . . I know hardly any Greek, and I don't see how ever one can come to the

point when one can say, 'Now I have read enough to form my convictions.'"

He vigorously attacked this intellectualism doomed to issue into an infinite inquiry.

There is simply no end to intellectual research. However much you read you would find, for example, that Drs. Bright and Pusey took one side, and Newman and Bellarmine the other; it is settled after all then on other grounds than that. If you had all the historical data of the world before you, you would be no nearer solution. "The word is very nigh thee, in thy heart."

Not that there is no room for intellect in the history of a conversion. At any rate :

The intellect, of course, comes in after a soul is *in* the Ark, and therefore safe, and in acquiring an accurate knowledge of the Ark and its contents; but these are not essential to salvation, and being in the Ark is.

I have insisted that Hugh Benson did not deny, or even minimise, the function of the intellect, even as a guide towards conversion. This very penitent he urged to intellectual self-discipline, especially when emotional moods tossed up their steamy clouds around her. She must solve situations by "cold" reasons when feelings and their sources are a perplexity. The Real Soul remains.

The *surface* of your soul is subject to storms. *Remember* your calm and what you saw in it six weeks ago. Don't look for God's face on the troubled surface of your soul.

Her life, he knew, had, on the whole, been one of rapid vision rather than connected argument, yet, said he, the more necessary would it prove that in hours when the vision failed she should not let herself lapse into apathy, but use the intellect which seemed to her, at such times, a torment :

That is the penalty of souls that live vividly : S. Teresa went through exactly the same thing : her life alternated between brilliant intuition and a dreariness and incapacity of seeing so great, that she could not even meditate, but had to read a book !

Please remember that I am preaching to myself too ; and forgive this long, impertinent letter.

That this reliance upon memory, and upon arguments whose value had once and for all been appreciated, rather than "sight," was painful, he did not for a moment deny. "Suddenly to use intellect is as painful as to set blood flowing through a cramped limb."

But always this exercise of the intellect was to be on large and simple lines, and not on points of detail. On the rare occasions on which he was tempted aside from the path he thus traced for himself he regretted it :

"Plainly," he wrote, in apology for having hurt her by some vivacity of expression, "I am not cut out for a controversialist. . . . In any case let us keep our controversy apart from other things—in a separate compartment ;—and as a beginning I am writing mine on separate sheets, and in a strictly business manner, and as impersonally as I can. . . . I *loathe* controversy ; it seems to ruin everything ; and yet I am somehow plunged in it. Please believe that it is really distasteful to me ; by 'controversy' I mean not the exposition of principles, which I both like and believe in doing, but the kind of thrust and parry that it is so easy to slip into. . . . It is very hard not to let one's blade slip sometimes, and I am afraid I must have let mine slip a good many times."

Controversy, moreover, is rarely ever profitable :

I believe that the secret of peace is to refuse to *attack*, and to come to a clear understanding at home that neither side will attack the other. To expound one's own principles, when one is asked, is a very different thing, and causes no irritation.

And, again, there is a second point. Catholicism in-

cludes, rather than excludes, sectarian doctrines. The more one thinks of it, the more one sees that as a Catholic one holds *all* the positive principles of the Church of England ; the difference is that one has ceased to hold their negations. And this is an enormous bond of union when one has realised it.

In consequence, the controversy, if such there must be, could, on the Catholic side at least, be carried on in all kindliness :

Between my mother and myself there is simply not a shadow of a shadow ; in many ways we are nearer to one another than we were before.

I am not "canting" when I say that I have never loved and admired the Church of England as I do now ; though, to be frank, I have not the smallest confidence in her.

To what is this singular paradox due ?

"I suppose," he answers, "it is because one is no longer involved in her shortcomings, and in a way responsible for them. The burden of all one's suspicions and miseries on her behalf is removed, and one can look clearly at her good points, the sincerity and devotion of her members, without any fear of being blinded by them.

"It is certainly true that if one is to do any good one must take this line, and see the best and not the worst of her—as indeed of all who love Our Lord."

"Anglicans," he wrote at another time, "*know* our criticisms and views about their Orders, &c., perfectly well ; what they *do not know* is our charity towards them. I think that Mrs. — is probably doing more to retard the conversion of God's simple children than perhaps any living Catholic."

He would even specify to what, outside the Church, his affections most inclined. This was, as a rule, High Anglicanism in the first place, because it preserved the notions of supernaturalism and of the sacramental system. Next came Quakerism, because of its deep interior spirituality.

"If there *must* be non-Catholics," he wrote, "I would wish them all to be High Churchmen."

When, however, intellect and intuition have failed, though apathy has not yet supervened, the storm-tossed soul may be tempted to take refuge in the mean omens of superstition ; these anyhow must be resisted :

"Signs" against the Church upset you and should be disregarded. Your experiences at Nauheim seem to me of more value than anything. It was a sort of steady crescendo of light ending in that glimpse of the Church "as a great kingdom, and that (you were) outside it." Of course it is possible to say I am begging the question in saying this, and have only eyes for what goes my way ; but the reason why I think this of more value is that it was an interior conviction *in spite of*, and in no way traceable to, your physical condition ; and further, that it was unaccompanied by any of those "signs" that had hitherto only served to distract you.

"You are made," he proceeded, "so completely in the mould of a Catholic, that you *could* not be happy even with the odd happiness of Agnostics, who have lost a sense of spiritual responsibility—you would just be happy and wretched always ; and GOD forbid that !

Meanwhile Benson prayed.

I cannot tell you how much I am feeling with you just now, and doing my best to pray ; and there is a sort of sense that the prayers go home, which one does not have by any means always.

His prayers were answered. This soul, throwing off the apathy which precluded conversion, struggled out into the light, and then sat gasping.

"As regards that numbness of soul," he consoled her, "my experience was just the same. Though, thank God ! it is passing now. I think one must expect that of one's soul ; it is like a weak creature coming out from a cave : one has to be very patient with it, and let it lie still and soak up sunshine and air for a long while."

Benson's complete statement of what the spiritual attitude of a now believing Catholic should be towards things of the intellect is, in fine, stated in the following extracts :

I wonder whether you are finding, as I am, that one's "agnosticism" is continually increasing—not as regards the definitions of the Church, but as to the enormous tracts of truth that she has not defined ; and again, that even definitions are only labels, infallibly true, *i.e.* infallibly the best way of describing truth, but quite inadequate to the whole of truth. They are adequate for man's need, and inadequate to Divine Facts.

And again, as to the so-called need of reconciliation between science and religion, he reminded her, first, that "[scholars] are in advance of authority, as thinkers always are" ; and then warned her gently against

advanced thinkers who are always crying out that there is a crisis directly there is a storm. It is their function, I suppose, under God, to put people on their guard ; and one of their uses is to make people distinguish between faith and opinion.

In 1907 an inquirer wrote to Father Benson that she had got "half way from Agnosticism to Catholicism and could get no further." His Lenten sermons at the Carmelite Church proved to her that he knew all that was to be known about that "borderland" and the helpless sensations of those imprisoned there. Her difficulty was that Catholics declared that their dogmas were true historically as well as spiritually (thus, the Ascension must be as "true" as the Armada) ; this she could not believe, and could not see to matter. In religion, mystical language was alone intelligible.

To this he answered :

*March 22 [1907].*

You open up a great many vast questions that one cannot answer adequately in a letter. May I try to indicate



only the kind of directions in which I think the answers lie ? . . .

Your main difficulty seems to me to lie along the old eternal difficulty of the relation between matter and spirit, the inner and the outer, Ideas and History. Now of course I agree frankly that the Spirit, the inner, and the Idea are primary. So I need not say anything about that. But the next fact is that this Inner Side does, as a matter of fact, express itself in outer ways. "God is a Spirit," but "The Word was made flesh." Further, it is quite evident that the outer is always inadequate to the inner. But, though it is inadequate to Spirit, this does not mean that it is necessarily inadequate to our conceptions of Spirit, nor that its analogies are not "true."

What therefore Catholics believe with regard to such things is (a) the spiritual principle, (b) that the spiritual principle did, as a matter of fact, express itself in (material) terms. And the more one contemplates the Gospels, the more it becomes evident that no other religion in the world links together in so amazing a way the deepest thoughts we can receive from God and outward events as their expression.

(What I think therefore is your obstacle to this, is that while you have tight hold of the importance of the Idea, and of the Transcendence of God, you have not sufficiently firm hold of the dignity of matter, or sufficient sympathy with its limitations.)

After this Father Benson draws out the already familiar process of the Soul's Approach. The Soul, awakened to her own desires, and seeking at least their explanation, looks around herself for illumination. The Church shines upon her. She watches that light : she interprets herself by the ray : the ray grows stronger : she yearns to "walk therein." The gift is given, and she believes.

He then adds :

I agree most entirely in what you say as to the difficulty of purifying motives. And I should advise you to make that your business. I should dwell infinitely more,

in your prayers, on what Mystics call the Way of Purgation than the Way of Union : I should go on compelling myself to realise my incredible smallness and helplessness, as well as irresolution and actual sins.

He then suggests an interview, for a later date, and a sojourn at the Cambridge Convent, where, he characteristically assures his correspondent, the "nuns are charming," the Reverend Mother "quite exceptional," and the girls no less "quite of the exceptional sort." The "atmosphere," he urged, would be so "excellent."

To an answer in which she declares that the "atmosphere" of a convent was precisely what she dreaded, and in all her efforts was haunted by the dread of self-suggestion, he replied :

*March 25.*

(. . .) I quite understand your fear of self-suggestion. But—

(1) No one ever arrives at anything without it. The love of one's parents, for example ; yet who can doubt that through that continued self- and external suggestion one arrives at a solid objective thing that would be almost certainly unattainable without it ?

(2) The fact that one has a certain temperament makes it necessary that all communications from God should be coloured by it. Purple glass affects but does not originate the light that fills the room.

(3) The tests as to whether self-suggestion is wholly responsible or not for any conviction, are to be found in (a) Intellectual Satisfaction in the things in which intellect is competent to judge ; (b) Moral development in oneself and the world generally. (Have you ever seen *The Key to the World's Progress*, by Devas ? It is ADMIRABLE, and gives one a real escape from the tortures of the self-suggestion theory.)

On the Feast of the Epiphany, 1908, she wrote again in great perplexity. She had studied Mme. Guyon's *Short and Easy Method of Prayer*, had tried her "recipes," and

found they came out right. She could reach what she believed to be the Prayer of Quiet. With a considerable shock, however, she discovered that precisely the same method was used, the same results obtained, by many others, who were not even Christians. Here, again, prayer seemed to be proved but a department of self-hypnotism.

In his answer Father Benson explains at some length his view of the nature of the Prayer of Quiet, which we need not enter upon again in this place. It should be noticed however that, in accepting his correspondent's terminology, he ceases to indicate by the expression "Prayer of Quiet" any preternatural form of prayer, or even "contemplation" in the ordinary sense, when the soul's faculties are in some manner suspended, and held timelessly and motionlessly exposed to the action of God. He means by it a state "into which one can sink by effort," and *not*, "in itself, actually a place of more direct contact with God." "It is much more like a quiet place, such as an empty church, where one can get nearer to God simply because there are few interruptions." Such a condition of soul Catholic, Quaker, Buddhist, and Theosophist can super-induce. Each creates his solitude. In *The Lord of the World*, Mabel Brand succeeds, in the desecrated Church, quite as well as does Father Franklin, by this method. Into this emptiness, unlooked-for guests may enter. So *The Necromancers* reminds us. But there is no harm in it, provided (as against the Quietists) the will is throughout not quiescent; nor spasmodically active, but steadily tense: and that (as against the Modernists) Christ is "accepted" with *all* the faculties of the soul working together, not by some independent religious faculty which may be contradicted by the intellect, as though each could be believed and obeyed *in its sphere*.

From this new starting point Father Benson summoned his correspondent once more towards the Church.

To an avowal of interior dereliction he wrote on June 14, 1908 :

. . . We are made for two lives, the inner and the outer. Materialism is the ultimate end of one, Spiritualism (not Spiritism) of the other. The only reconciliation of the two, if principles are carried right out, is Catholicism . . . (by which I mean not just Sacramentalism or Symbolism, but corporate religious life, that is, outer, supra-national, . . . and all the rest). I can see nothing, anywhere, that even intelligibly *claims* to perform this function except the Catholic Church.

Now it appears to me that you have been trying to do without it; to develop an individual inner life, and to project an outer religious life of *your own* (. . .). And it appears to me that the sudden blankness that you describe is a perfectly inevitable result of that attempt.

Certainly blankness comes to anyone. But with Catholics it does not really matter much, because in these moments of individual faltering one gets swept along (exactly as is intended) by the corporate life of the Mystical Body.

Meditation therefore (and prayer and the rest) is half-crippled, and becomes Quietism, with all its penalties, so long as it is not planted in a soil external to itself—that is, in the organised religious life of the world; and this, undoubtedly, is Catholicism. The “Communion of Saints” and the “Catholic Church” are two articles, not one.

His correspondent answered (June 17) that she could not *but* build up her own religious life by borrowing from Catholicism all that “outsiders” might be suffered to lay hold of. To become an “Anglican” was unthinkable; and to become a Catholic seemed to sacrifice “intellectual liberty.” She felt, in consequence, “thoroughly wretched” whenever she reflected on her position.

Father Benson could not desert one who was "thoroughly wretched" : he answered next day :

Please don't think I'm trying to *persuade*. I only state what appears to me a Law, as sure as a law of nature, and as inevitable. The Law is—in all planes as well as spiritual—that it is not good for man to be alone.

"Vae Soli." And if one  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{can't} \\ \text{won't} \end{array} \right\}$  submit to Law, things happen. Our Lord states it as "If any man will save his life, let him lose it," and the interpretation, in this regard, appears to be that an isolated religious life leads to . . . isolation and unfruitfulness and desolation.

Honestly, I think your fear of losing intellectual liberty is a dream. . . . Of course it is a fact that some do lose it, just as others become formalists because of the forms ; and so on. But I know one need not. One does not lose one's intellectual liberty when one learns mathematics, though one certainly loses the liberty of doing sums wrong, or doing them by laborious methods !

He indicates how the corporate life develops just those modest and domestic virtues to which, she had urged, participation in the "Body" would not assist her ; and, with the gentlest tact, reminds her that it takes all sorts to make a Church.

The inquirer, gratefully recognising that he was not "trying to persuade," acknowledged too that he had "scored very heavily on the last round." The perils of isolation were undisputed. Yet loss of liberty was no dream. No mathematical professor has the right to forbid a pupil doing problems his own way : no authority should dare forbid a mind to ask itself "where does this line of argument land me if honestly pursued," yet such is the Church's action, if she commands, for example, belief in the single authorship of Isaiah.

He wrote her a rather austere reply, in which he indicated that to form societies was a human instinct, which

proved that the undoubted loss of individual freedom was compensated for by the products of combined activities ; that she was "a little hard on Catholic scholars," who were but biassed as "a scientist is biassed" by the knowledge that the earth goes round the sun. "Definitions" hinder, not research, but precipitate research and premature conclusions ; the "instinct" of the Church has often proved true, even when her decisions, based upon it, have outrun the "evidence" ; again, a subordinate truth, ill-advisedly proclaimed, may, in appearance, falsify a larger truth. "Personally I am a violent defender of the Cardinals against Galileo." He might state his view as a theory ; not yet as proved. "And scientists tell us now that they were right—that Galileo *hadn't* proved it, though he was right."

Here are the lambs of Christ's flock. . . . Is a stout old ram to upset and confuse them when he needn't . . . even though he is right ? The flock must be led gently and turned in a great curve. We can't all whip round in an instant. We are tired and discouraged, and some of us are exceedingly stupid and obstinate. Very well ; then the rams can't be allowed to make brilliant excursions in all directions and upset us all. We shall get there some day, if we are treated patiently. We are Christ's lambs, after all.

He explains the disciplinary decree relating to the authorship of Isaiah. Those who lose their liberty by it are the

brilliant young men who might else bawl out in a pulpit all about manuscripts and aspects and Babylonian tablets . . . and that there were at least four Isaiahs . . . to poor and stricken hearers, who might feel that two Isaiahs somehow destroyed the credit of one.

Please forgive any offensive remarks that, probably, I have made. But I really do not think that you have quite

enough reverence for the stupid. *Maxima debetur reverentia pueris*. Who would dream of treating a child by the policy of, "If it's true, he'd better know it"? And we Catholics are most of us children . . . and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

This letter elicited an answer, humorously penitent for the most part, but, in fine, confessing that the correspondence was stirring up, not Christian charity, but mental and moral storms, which could be for no one's good. After this, I think, it lapsed.

The following group of letters has, too, a special value. I do not think the temperament of their recipient is a rare one. It can lead its victim (for is it pessimistic to suppose that more men suffer from their temperaments than rejoice in them or even control them?) through many vivid impressions, masterful moods, and sincere emotions, to the brink of that act of *committing* himself in which genuine choice is implied; and then, the complementary colours dazzle the view, phrases tinkle in the brain, thought thins out into imagination; and in too many cases religion becomes just one thing more to talk about, cleverly, no doubt, but saddeningly, to a listener who is still trying to catch the authentic accent of a soul which has laid hold of the extremest hem, it may be, of God's garment, and refuses to let Him go until He shall yet further have blessed him. I speak of the general temperament, not (need I once more say?) of its particular examples, or of this case or that. Of the unfinished pilgrimage of Father Benson's correspondent clearly I have even less call to advance my speculations. I can but thank him for the generosity which has led him to entrust to me these letters of so many years.

When the first letter from which I quote was written, the attraction which Father Benson's correspondent felt

towards the Catholic Church was still at that stage which makes a man abuse what he fears. Father Benson answered :

*July 22, 1907.*

You use the word "preposterous" a good many times. Now, you know, that won't do. The Popish religion may (for purposes of argument) be untrue, or fail to convince you, but it can't be obviously preposterous, otherwise what man with brains equal to yours, and equal opportunities for studying it, could believe it? I think the Anglican religion quite untrue, but I wouldn't call it preposterous. For you to call the Catholic religion preposterous therefore *must* mean that you are wrong somewhere, either in the facts or in your moral attitude. [You declare you do not like our Ritual.] Now I, like you, feel practically *no* subjective devotion for such things. But I am aware that is because I am limited and self-centred, not because I am spiritual. Have you considered the elaborate Ritualism of heaven, I wonder, as set forward in the Apocalypse? "But that is only symbolical." Exactly.

[In answer to your other objections.]

(1) I do *not* limit the grace and the favour of God to any channel at all; "God is not bound to sacrament (or Church)": BUT WE ARE.

(2) I am exactly as materialistic as that Religion is which is built upon the text "The Word (*i.e.* the most intense Spiritual Principle) was made *Flesh*."

(3) "I build pyramids upon a grain." Change the metaphor and say, "The Kingdom of God is like to a grain of mustard seed . . . it becomes a tree."

From finding the Catholic Church "preposterous," the inquirer now realised he "hated" it.

*August 4, 1907.*

(1) You are perfectly right in hating *your image* of the Catholic Church. I believe the reality is dawning, incredibly slowly, behind this image; and when you see that, you will fall down and adore.

(2) This leads up to my second point. Your dilemma of God's not answering prayer if the Catholic Church is true, is no dilemma, BECAUSE GOD HAS NOT NEARLY DONE



WITH YOU. He is allowing you—I am absolutely certain—to see mirage after mirage thrown off by the Church, and is encouraging you to abhor these. He is answering your prayers and mine as hard as He can, and, best of all, is giving you sincerity and courage. (This is not Jesuitical flattery, but solid fact.)

Please continue, if you will, to meditate upon

{God is a Spirit

{The Word was made Flesh}

You are not one twentieth part deep enough in that yet. It is the very bones of the Universe.

He was showing, too, a tendency to seek elsewhere the casket, so to say, in which the Church is accustomed to enshrine her gifts—indeed, those very gifts themselves, except the privilege of obedience.

*August 14, 1907.*

Now I'll tell you what my one fear is for you—that you should become a High Churchman. (I don't think you will, as a matter of fact ; but it is the only thing I fear.) . . .

If you don't do this, please remain exactly what you are—a fervent Evangelical. It's next best to being a Catholic. I don't think there can be anything which Evangelicals *assert* that you need deny. They tell men to repent, to believe, to love, to hope. Well, Contrition, Faith, Hope, and Charity are the four pillars of spiritual life and salvation. It's only when they begin to deny and omit, that they go wrong. In all their positive teaching they're Excellent. Don't leave them, please, until you come to the Mother of Souls, who has all that and ten thousand more graces of which they never dream.

However, Father Benson's friend at this point determined to become an Anglican clergyman.

*June 4, 1908.*

It beats me altogether how you can enter on the service of the Church of England, particularly in the hypothetical kind of mind that you are in. Undoubtedly you do so enter, conscientiously—but . . . well, there the puzzle is. I don't think I could bear even to remain a priest, much less become one, as a kind of experiment. I should just

stick it out and say to Our Lord, "Well, here I am, perfectly ready to do exactly as you wish. But I am not going to *commit* myself to a commission of which I am not entirely convinced. You must convince me if you want me. Meanwhile, *j'y suis*, *j'y reste*, as a humble worshipper ; until you say, Lord, Friend, come up higher."

Above all, Father Benson once more urged, let him *pray*, and obtain prayers, and associate himself in every possible way with the prayer world. Not information was what now he wanted, but grace.

*July 16, 1908.*

Let me recommend to you the Servite Church in Fulham Road for a prayer now and then. For myself, I can't pray in the Oratory at all. But above all, let me recommend the Cathedral at Westminster. That is the best miniature of the Catholic Church as a whole that I know.

But please remember that you don't know what the Church is in the least until you have seen her really at her prayers in a Religious House. There you see her in her inmost heart, intimately, and at home. In the Oratory she is like a lady out walking in her furs and jewels.

Epigram, however, allusion, and small clevernesses still bulked too large, Benson felt, in the answers which he received :

*July 18, 1908.*

I hate to see you thrashing yourself to pieces over nothing at all, and going off with your face down on the trail of corrupt red herrings. For God's sake and your own, be Large and Patient and look at Big Principles, and don't try to "score."

Father Benson was enormously strengthened in his conviction that the spirit, not the intellect, need any more be "worked," by his visit to Lourdes.

*September 24, 1908.*

I have an immense amount to tell you. I have been to France and seen the Continental idolatries once more and assisted at them *toto corde*. Finally I have been to Lourdes

and seen Jesus of Nazareth pass by, and the sick leap from their beds cured. My Dear . . . I am more of a Gospel Christian than ever. I simply did not realise for one instant that such things really and truly happened *now*. . . . "These signs shall follow" and the rest. I made "an act of faith." Now I have seen. . . .

Next . . . I want you to come on a Non-Catholic pilgrimage on August 20, next year, to Lourdes. I already have two or three promised. It will cost about £12—some Papists are accompanying us. We shall be away from London about one week, and shall be present at the National Pilgrimage of France. Our Lady simply lives there, you know—a great Mother who sometimes says No, and sometimes Yes. She, and her Divine Son, are nearer to me than ever in all my life. . . . You *must* come and see her. I am happy beyond description at having done it myself. Oh, dear me . . . when will people understand? . . . God bless you.

And a little later :

*October 20, 1908.*

Lourdes. My Dear, it is impossible in a letter. To describe it would be to describe Christianity. Do you understand that Our Lord and His Mother go about there together in all but visible form? She holds receptions in the Grotto, and He goes to and fro in state. You meet Him daily carried by His priest, going on some unknown business, and all the people fall down in the streets as He goes by.

His friend, however, betook himself to immediate preparation for the Anglican ministry, and retired further and further, Benson judged, from contact with that supernatural which was alone necessary.

*October [1908].*

Well, well—this is a long affair. The hope is that you'll begin to feel, when you're doing St. Paul's Colossians in the Original Greek from 10-11, with Sext (expurgated) at 12 . . . that these things aren't Christ's Christianity . . . and that an unshaven Irish priest in his confessional-box from 3-6, 7-10 P.M. who knows nothing whatever about

Greek, and grumbles at the length of his Office, is more like an Apostle. Oh, you'll come to it—please God—and be Happy.

No, Father Benson urged, Mirfield, to which a visit had been paid, proved not at all that the Church of England, as a Church, was a sanctioned fountain of the supernatural.

*November 10, 1908.*

Yes. Mirfield is exquisite . . . and Mirfield is full of people who love God; whom God allows to stop where they are that they may bring thousands into His Church. Of course it isn't a Patch on any one of our ten thousand Monasteries; and it isn't the least characteristic of the Ch. of E. Now is it? Have you ever before met the Ch. of E. anywhere, in that guise?

The point was not that in this or that institution the Supernatural was discoverable, but that the whole Catholic Church, *as such*, was supernatural, and the completed Christ.

*November 19, 1908.*

And what the Church's *claim* is, is that she is the MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST. (*Conventionalists*, p. 125, last par.) Let me expound that. I have never yet met a Non-Catholic, except those on the verge of conversion, who even understood that claim was made. This isn't a lovely metaphor. It is a Spiritual Fact. We are the cells which, added together in organic union, make up the actual Body of Incarnate God.

This, then, is the way by which the Church dares to demand Divine Faith in herself—why she dares to claim infallibility, and indefectibility . . . “Thou shalt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.”

She isn't just His representative, His Ambassador . . . whom He in a kind of external miracle keeps in the right path. But *she is He*. Or, rather, His Body in which He dwells.

In this case, where with a hundred coloured images his correspondent was seeking to break up the white light so

fain to shine upon him, Benson abandons argument for assertion, and utters downright oracles :

*November 29, 1908.*

MY DEAR,—You must be a Redemptorist. There's not a shadow of a doubt. I can see you happy, confident with a detached and apostolic spirit, in a Redemptorist House, fitting it like a figure in a niche. I can't see you established anywhere else on God's earth.

In February he returns from Ireland and writes an ecstatic note :

*February 20, 1909.*

Mission in Ireland. At Holy Communion and during services people murmur exclamations of sorrow and praise—one is constantly blessed out loud in the streets, by men and women. No need for the priests to run after the people—all they can do to escape them—they forgive the priest anything—never angry or resentful against them. I longed to have you there to see for yourself what the faith is. How utterly different from England. The last service—Church crammed—aisles full—rooms opening on to the Church crammed—hardly possible to get to the pulpit. At close, act of contrition by 4000 people—each lighted a candle and renewed Baptismal Vows.

Similar scenes in a smaller way at a lecture at the Mansion House in Dublin—huge crowd—bellows of applause at the name of the Rosary and the "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." Protestant Canon wrote to Lord Mayor to protest and to ask if he would lend the Mansion House for a Protestant meeting. "No," said the Mayor, "because yours is not the true religion." Isn't that heavenly?

I feel so small and humiliated ; and so entranced. . . . What do you think of the child of a Protestant minister being brought to me to be cured of bad eyes ? ! ! !

After the distraction of study, came that of good works.

*March 13, 1909.*

I don't like your public-house scheme : simply because it seems to me that you are grabbing at it as a means of distraction. You want to work, not to "dream" ? But "the hand cannot say to the eye, I have no need of thee." The work

is useless unless the eye informs it. Far more, you need a long Retreat in peace, to face yourself and God Almighty.

Forgive also another remark. You say "I am more satisfied with the Anglican Church. Our Vicar is so splendid. . . ." That is EXACTLY my point about Anglicans. They *will* muddle Persons and Systems. I had far rather say—as I do—"I am supremely satisfied with the Catholic Church. Our priests are so stupid."

I wish you would come here (S. Claudio) and feel the sunlight of Our Lord. Behind Him is the ermine robe in which Napoleon was crowned. . . . There is a continual congregation there, in dead silence : and Our Lord beams down on them. On one day I saw there in twenty minutes (1) a crowd of beggars, (2) shopkeepers, (3) Prince Massimo, (4) Queen Margherita. . . . No service, or sermon. Simply the Saviour of the World under His own veil.

Benson's friend did not seek him at Rome, but at Hare Street. Yet from Hare Street too he went away, after a moment's resolution, sorrowful.

HARE STREET HOUSE, BUNTINGFORD,  
July 8, 1911.

Of course I am as sorry as I can be. Since, *knowing* Peter to be Peter and seeing what your condition was here, I am quite sure that Grace came then. But, on the other hand, I have no right to assume that you knew it too !

. . . My dear, I really do get very uncomfortable sometimes ! I can't think what God could have given you that He has not ! However, I tried to describe all that in my last letter.

July 5, 1914.

It is ages since I heard from you, and you are very much on my soul ! I know that you are all wrong where you are ; and really it is like watching a person freezing to death in a crevasse, when he ought to be walking. I was talking of you—without name or hint of any kind—to a priest a day or two ago, and that has made it acute again.

The sufferer himself felt that numbing frost.

Aug. 1914.

The deadness you speak of was PRECISELY my experience—till I saw that it would pass into Death if I didn't

move. So I went, blind and dumb and paralysed, to my Great Mother, and dozed in her arms for a year at least. Then I began to "take notice." . . . Oh, don't let it become Death ; and for GOD's sake don't take refuge in anyone human. That is eating earth to satisfy hunger. Certainly it *stops* hunger ; but——

One more letter passed :

HARE STREET HOUSE, BUNTINGFORD,  
Sept. 15, 1914.

My dear, you are running away from Christ. Don't dream that He can ever be to you what He was when you were a boy. He has led you with *extraordinary* clearness, step by step, till first you said that your *intellect* was convinced but your heart told you not ; and now that you daren't let your heart go, because that is convinced too.

I don't care a straw about Roman scandal. Allow that it's all true. *That's not the reason.* It wasn't the reason when you were here, and it isn't now. Of course you grab at it to make it look decent to yourself : but that's not it.

*Nor is it Modernism.* Modernism explains away Christ, and you believe in Him. Of course you grab at this too, and solemnly say there is something wrong with the Nicene Creed ; but that wasn't the reason when you were here, and it isn't now.

Do you know what it is ? Well ; it is this.

You learned as a boy to love Christ and to accept Him simply ; you seized on that, and He seized on you and knit you up with Him till He really trusted you. And when you had all that acquaintance with Him, He began, at Cambridge, first to instruct your head. You still had your heart sound, and you could bear that. Then when the head began to hurt, you took refuge in the heart. "At least I love Christ," you said.

Then He attacked the Heart and drove you out of that too. So of course you are miserable : you have nowhere to go : both Head and Heart are occupied by Him, and you can't face even Him, now. So you are contemplating becoming exterior—you whom our Lord has honoured with astonishing interior intimacies.

And you talk about

(1) Marrying (which means) distracting yourself with a woman whom you regard as an escape :

(2) "Being kind to a few hundred people," which = shirking again interior things with them.

And all that is the matter is that you will not *accept* Christ—just the very thing you were trained to do as a boy, so far as you and your teachers knew. Not merely, then, are you refusing a new leading of Christ, but you are apostatising from the old leading.

Do you think I dare write like this to many people? I have never written such things before to *any one* . . . Because you are the first I have ever met of whom I could say, "I know that he knows Christ, and that he is turning his back on Him; and I know that he knows it too."

Oh, may Jesus be a Jesus to you, and save you from yourself.—Yours,

R. H. B.

This was the last letter of a correspondence easily to be recognised as unique. Benson burned himself out, watching meanwhile, he feared, a deadlier Death putting out the candles on the altar of his friend's soul. The supreme moment, when the sacrifice might have been offered, had been, he believed, passed by; to few souls would that moment be offered twice. Perhaps advancing age would silence the majority of those voices which confounded the years of youth, and the divine Call be for the first time truly heard. But *timeo Iesum prætereuntem*. The vocation might not come again, and the limits of the future might lie irrevocably within the "far horizon" of the past.

I have therefore quoted from letters which demanded, if I may generalise quite roughly, a historical, an intellectual, a mystical and a moral response respectively. It will be seen how in each case Fr. Benson tends to emphasize the moral aspect, both in the preparation and in the application of the will, and then trusts to the working power of a few great principles. They were to be the leaven; if that into which they came were suitably receptive, and, so to say, co-operative, the interaction of these two forces would create the perfect bread of Christ.



A notable part of his "direction" was concerned, of course, with what is known as "vocations." "Vocation" was undoubtedly a directive idea in his existence. He considered that a definite call was given by God to each soul, a call which could lead it to the highest perfection in quite the least cloistral circumstances—and in support of his consequent belief that the word "Vocation" was by "a very common, but very lamentable, practice" employed as though God gave no call to any souls except that to the Priesthood and Religion, he wrote the preface to a small book by H. M. K., a Carmelite Tertiary. It was meant to help those who by ill-health or from other reasons were debarred from the cloister. The utterly degraded notion that uncloistered souls may not hope to aspire to high sanctity was here vigorously combated by him, and the particular dangers to which an aspiring soul, unsafeguarded by the veil or cowl, might be exposed were touched upon and a method was supplied. "Undoubtedly," he concluded, "the Religious Orders and the Priesthood present the life of consecration, and foster devotion as nothing else can do. . . . Yet, in another sense, the whole Christian people is a priesthood; and every soul a bride of Christ. It was for those who realise this, that *Thesaurus Fidelium* was compiled."

The "religious" life strictly so called was, of course, regarded by him as a transcendent privilege, and the contemplative life was its crown of triumph. I need not quote from *The Light Invisible*, *The Conventionalists*, *The Winnowing*, *None Other Gods*, to convince any one of that. But in the pages upon *Loneliness* it will be seen that all Hugh Benson's interior life was in a sense cloistral, or rather eremitical, and that in urging too high, even, a proportion of his penitents to "try their vocation" with Carthusians or with Carmelites,

he was following an inclination constantly discernible within his own soul. In this department, too, of human assessment, his judgment was far from infallible. Even those whom, it seemed, he ought to have known best, but in whom he was *idealistically* (so to put it) interested and therefore misconstrued, he often thrust into cloisters which speedily reopened to give them exit. Also I think he was hypnotised somewhat by the Carthusian, Carmelite, and Poor Clare Orders, to such an extent that he did not know, even, enough about the others. In spite of Huysmans, the Trappists appear but little in his writing: I think he was alarmed by the terrible lack of *privacy* in their life, and of those traditions which his fastidious taste would have carried even into religion. His daily bath had reached for him the status of a ritual act of worship. He said once, indeed, that if his *Lord of the World* were put upon the Index, he would abandon writing, and become a Carthusian; but it was the Benedictines to whom his affections ever more constantly were setting, towards the end.

In the "religious" life it was not spiritual luxury for which he allowed his penitents to hope. To one who feared herself debarred from entering a convent for lack of dowry, and had objected that people in the world suffered worse and more real poverty than religious, he agreed, and made the usual distinctions; ending:

Of course it seems a terrible pity that a dowry should so often be demanded. . . . Yet is it not true that the dowry has reference nearly always not to the Religious State *per se*; but to the external works to which the particular Religious are pledged? There are surely many communities who do not demand this, such as the Poor Clares, Capuchins, Carthusians. . . . And, in any case, for one who desires "Religion" pure and simple, it is always possible to become a lay sister. If one demands the extra "luxuries," of education and refinement and so

on, which a choir sister enjoys, I do not see anything unreasonable in the demand for a dowry. One is paying for these, not for the religious status.

To one actually hesitating between marriage and the religious state, he permitted the taking of a temporary vow :

It is impossible that a vocation to marriage should be missed through a vow for one year. If it is God's will that you should ultimately marry, it is impossible that a vow taken in good faith, and carefully observed, in letter and spirit, should hinder His will.

An event occurred which solved his penitent's problem automatically and for ever. He wrote :

I can't help feeling glad of the news now. It is bound to lessen the human regrets that must have been yours if you hadn't tried. God, in His goodness, has "exposed His hand," and you can throw down your own. I must apologise for that metaphor : but it is exactly what I mean. All the while He knew that you were not created for each other, however close in sympathy : and that was His strength. And He allows you by this to see that your vow was both supernaturally and naturally true to an instinct deeper than judgment or knowledge.

These two letters were written while he was still an Anglican : for the summing up of his doctrine of *active resignation* let me quote from a group of Catholic letters, dealing generally with the same topic :

I find it very difficult to sum up my impressions, chiefly, I think, because the story is not ended. The whole point of Divine guidance is that we do not know why we are being guided—that is, the final end to which we are moving ; and I do not think we have any power of pronouncing on details, or of claiming to understand them, until the whole object is revealed. Of course we always want to know.

This issues, then, it seems to me, in two principles.

(1) "Circumstance is the Voice of God." It seems to me that in outward action you have been in the right path, following the hints, and believing that they came from God,

(2) It is impossible in incidents which take place in the exterior world, and also in interior drawings or apparent communications for the most part, to set them down as *directly* divine. . . . Of course, as I have said, they are indirectly divine, and must be dealt with (as you have dealt with them), but since exterior incidents are largely under the control of others, and interior communications have to pass through the medium of our own characters, it is impossible to be dogmatic about them, though one is bound to follow them within limits.

This is particularly so, I think, in your case. You have a strongly-coloured character—like the deep stain of glass—and all light that comes through it must be deeply coloured by it. Since however the colour as well as the white light is of God's making, you are bound to accept the *coloured* light as from Him; though you cannot have the peculiarly pleasant certainty that it is all *directly* from Him at the moment that it comes.

This then leads me up to one more point.

In clear and uncomplicated characters, the danger is that they should dwell too much on outward things, and neglect self-knowledge. In strongly-coloured characters (I can think of no other words) the danger is the opposite, that of introversion. This, it seems to me, taken all round, is your danger. You find, as is perfectly natural, an extraordinary pleasure in analysis, simply because you have got so much to analyse. I should follow *circumstances* simply, without troubling to analyse and classify them. This, it seems to me, will solve nine out of ten of your difficulties.

Simply throw yourself upon God's *external* providence.

Every single soul tends overmuch to one or other of these directions; but I feel very confident indeed that this is the one that you tend to emphasize. And I speak as dogmatically as this about it, because I know that it is my own tendency as well, and that practically all my own difficulties in the past have come from it.

Of course this counteracting of one's tendency is extremely difficult. It seems to me sometimes as if this were the greatest illustration of all of our Lord's words, that "he who loses his life shall find it."

## CHAPTER III

### "THE NECROMANCERS"

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped  
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead . . .  
I was not heard—I saw them not,

SHELLEY.

ONE entire department of Hugh Benson's life is incarnated, so to say, in his novel *The Necromancers*, which deals with the whole subject of Spiritualism. From childhood till his death, he was preoccupied with the uncanny and the occult, and with every possible form of abnormal phenomena. But here, as elsewhere, you will observe in Benson two quite different men: one at first sight sceptical, hard-headed, scientific; the other fantastic, credulous, childish even, to the exasperation of his friends' patience, and, in some cases, to the genuine shocking of their belief in his sincerity.

I would suggest asking from him first of all his deliberate and reasoned view—what, in fact, he in his serious and responsible hours considered might safely be asserted, and this is found adequately enough in a series of articles which appeared in the *Dublin Review*, and a paper published by the Catholic Truth Society.

In these documents he expresses, first, his belief in Catholic doctrine: that is, the existence of spirits, incarnate and disincarnate, malignant and beneficent, and capable, in certain circumstances, of immediate interaction.

He then advances a theory of Personality which, because so far removed from the "scholastic" or "theological" definitions in its method of formation and its formulæ, he caused to be carefully examined by distinguished theologians; he was satisfied with their favourable verdict, and, I think, acquiesced in a few verbal alterations or precisions. The whole of his further theorising presupposes this hypothesis of Personality, and it is worth while, in consequence, to summarise it carefully.

In July, 1907, he published in the *Dublin Review* the article entitled "A Modern Theory of Human Personality." He presents as *legenda* Hudson's *Law of Psychic Phenomena*; W. James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and his *Human Immortality*; F. W. Myers' *Human Personality*, and Starbuck's *Psychology of Religion*; and he lays down as axiom that the field on which Science and Religion shall, in the immediate future, find their conflicts and reconciliations, will be that of Psychology. Now at the heart of all psychology, he proclaims, is the question of Human Personality: and he at once differentiates all past theories of Personality as those in which the *self* was treated as a monad, a unit having "faculties," an initial, a principle; and as those in which it was regarded as a sum, a composite, a result, a term. He then states what he calls the modern theory which combines these two. The Personality is indeed one, yet consists of two departments—the objective and supraliminal self, a "room" where "the ordinary and practical faculties" reside, observation, reflection, induction and the like; and the subjective or sublimary (subliminal), or sub-conscious self, the home of "mysterious inhabitants," faculties like imagination, powers of idealism, art and intuition, roots of passion and feeling, acquired habits and inherited tendencies. The upper

room communicates with the lower as by a trapdoor, which may be wholly, or partially, and periodically or permanently, opened. With a wealth of metaphor he relates the intercommunications of upper with lower. These may indeed be practically in abeyance, as when in childhood the upper sleeps; or, as when in some mere sensualist (or even mere intellectualist), life is unaffected by deeper influences; or again, communication may be peaceable, as when in sane manhood the upper “constitutionally” governs the lower; or revolutionary, when the “inner self” spasmodically invades the “outer” as at crises, say, of adolescence. Interaction may be, again, permanently anarchic, as in madness, when the trapdoor is, so to say, “jammed open”: or, at least, inexplicable, as in the abrupt intuitions of artists or of genius. In the subliminal self, once more, dwells a subjective memory, active often when the “objective” memory fails us—as when an old man can remember his baby frock, but not his wife’s death a week ago: in it too reside the unconscious powers which, for instance, measure time while we are asleep or absorbed; and indeed, we perceive that they often act the more freely for such sensitive absorption—more freely still, perhaps, in the hypnotic trance, and they are most emancipated of all, it seems, at the moment of death.

This theory, he argues, and to this he was leading up, cannot prove, but renders plausible, immortality. First, it is at least clear that this inner self can act directly on other similar selves: that is, it possesses powers which act *independently* of ordinary perception and communication; in fact the better (as we saw) for the relative inhibition of these; best, often, at the hour of the “death” of brain and body; and indeed such a self is a “very

fair though wholly untheological description" of what we mean by "soul." Here his language becomes almost Platonic, and his argument that partly of the *Phaedo*. This suggests that the inner self can force its way out, not only upwards, into the supraliminal sphere, but downwards, as it were, right into the "other world," the real and spiritual world, leaving a void behind it. If into this void *alien spiritual realities* then enter, the phenomenon of *possession* is observable should the invader replace wholly the vagrant Self: of *obsession* should the alien spirit enter *with* the Self and co-inhabit its secret mansion. Benson claims at least that we have, in this theory, a neutral terrain on which Science and Religion may meet, inspect, and finally embrace each other.<sup>1</sup>

His explicit utterances on this subject are best found in an article entitled "Spiritualism" in the *Dublin Review* for October, 1909, and in a contribution to the Catholic Truth Society's series of papers dealing with the History of Religions,<sup>2</sup> written in 1910. The papers are not dissimilar, though the former suggests somewhat an introduction to a full study, never written, of which the latter should be a rather "popular" résumé. Benson insists, with a certain bitterness of reproach directed against the complacent and the scornful, that Spiritualism *matters*; that it is increasing amazingly and ravaging the Church,

<sup>1</sup> In *Christian Science* and the like he perceived the refuge of non-Catholics scared by the triumph of modern materialism, seemingly imminent, over traditional beliefs. The so-called "spiritual reaction" of quite modern date would then, at this time, have appeared to Benson rather as a further flight towards the imaginary than a recapture of the real. He allowed, however, that it might be a roundabout way home. In his brother Mr. E. F. Benson's sympathetic study of Christian Science in *The House of Defence*, he perceived that the author's pilgrimage was incomplete, but still progressing aright. See the *Dublin Review*, July, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> The C.T.S. also reprinted his *Dublin Review* article.



and that the more sceptical the Psychological Society may show itself as to its phenomena, the less should the wise man neglect the evidence—evidence which has absorbed the attention of a Professor Barrett, Sir Oliver Lodge, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick; of Professor Richet in France, and Lombroso in Italy. Moreover, the man of science, he postulates, admits on his side as proven certain phenomena such as telepathy, difficult to incorporate into the scholastic system of psychology, though fully to be harmonised with the data of spiritualism, while on the other the Catholic is dogmatically committed to belief in survival, apparitions, demoniac possession, angelic guidance, and intraspiritual communications generally. Indeed, the only point at which Catholic and spiritualist *theories* clash is, that the Catholic maintains that the spiritual experiences, if such exist, which Spiritualists by their method and on their presuppositions reach, are bad, and demoniacal in origin. She does this, not only in accordance with her immemorial law that man may not “go aside after magicians and soothsayers” and seek hidden knowledge by necromancy, but because she perceives by experience that in professed spiritualists faith always, *sooner or later*, suffers, while morals often (and terribly) deteriorate; that their nervous system itself tends to collapse; that the utter and comprehensive futility of all spiritualistic communications, coupled with the frauds less of an exterior, simulative kind (on the part of the medium) than of an intrinsic sort (on the part of the spiritual intelligence involved), make it obvious that the origin and aim of these phenomena is bad. She considers, in fine, that certain subordinate hypotheses involved in the spiritualist theory are out of harmony with, if not directly contrary to, her general eschatology. In these articles,

and still more explicitly in certain reviews of Fr. Lépiciér, Mr. Godfrey Raupert, and Dr. Lapponi, on whom he chiefly relies for evidence, he professes himself emphatically "agnostic," as the Church is, with regard to this or that phenomenon, but insists, again with her, that if spirits be indeed involved, they are malicious and lying, and that to tamper with them is utterly to be reprobated. He practically, as I said, rejects the theory that the phenomena are true to telepathy or to any as yet uncodified powers of human nature. Why the exercise of "deeply founded human faculties" should issue into obscenity and blasphemy he cannot see. The Catholic theory of obsession and possession gives, he considers, however, a simple and an adequate solution. I acknowledge that the modern who insists that every enigma is at all costs to be solved in terms of human nature is as bigoted and unreasonable as our ancestors, who regarded every tracking down of natural secondary causes as a rationalist attack on that divine First Cause they everywhere regarded as immediate—thunder was God's voice; God unlocked the treasures of hail and rain and snow and scattered them upon the earth. But I cannot see that Benson takes into sufficient consideration the fact that possible use connotes possible misuse, and that the misuse of natural faculties habitually disused may indeed produce cerebral and even psychic disequilibrium which may end in inverting the entire personality. Now, the quasi-dislocation within the human composite which the spiritualist strives to induce in himself, when he hushes thought and will in search of direct subliminal communication, may well be such an abnormality and misuse.

Benson, in these very guarded utterances, has, it will

be observed, marked a definite retreat in comparison to the ready welcome he was prepared to give to the somewhat dualistic theory he at first discussed. In a paper entitled “Phantasms of the Dead,” however, which appeared in the *Dublin Review* of January, 1912, the pendulum has swung back very far. Its analysis is as follows.

All “ghost-stories” relate to apparitions at or about the time of death, or to an often considerably later period (those, *e.g.*, concerning haunted houses). The (strictly scientific) evidence for the former, he insists again and again, “places them beyond all reasonable doubt.” “It is scarcely possible for an educated man to deny (them) . . .” and so on. For the latter, the evidence is indefinitely poorer. To explain the former, the Society for Psychical Research most favours the theory of Telepathy. In fact, this has passed into being “as much an established fact among psychologists as the Law of Gravitation among physical scientists.” “There is probably not one educated person in the world who does not allow of the existence of the Law in some degree.” The mechanism of Telepathy involves, we saw, the statement that two or more inner or subconscious souls can intercommunicate independently of the usual instruments of sensation and reason. The subconscious soul, say, of a dying man, whose conscious soul is by now all but quiescent, can project itself in such a way as to affect directly the subconscious soul of, say, his wife. Now the impression received there traces the opposite path to that pursued by most human impressions, which proceed from eye to brain, from brain into conscious ideas, thence to sink into subconsciousness; for subconscious communications pass from within outwards, *ending* by clothing themselves in what the brain and even the optic nerves can, owing to their associated

stock-in-trade, supply. Thus, the wife will end by seeing the husband who is in subconscious contact with her. This theory pleases Benson better wholly than that which sets one soul a-travelling through the air till it "touches," so to say, another; and better, partly, than that which clothes the spiritual thought in "astral matter" drawn from the thinker's body, as spirits, in spiritualist displays, are made visible, it is often held, by sheer matter—subtle enough, no doubt, yet genuinely matter—emanating from the medium. Catholic dogma has not condemned this view, he owns (indeed, we hear of "bodies of air" in which even modern theologians suggest that angels, for example, may render themselves visible); but he thinks it raises more difficulties than it solves. Telepathy, then, he holds, is an adequate explanation of death-phantasms. But he goes further, and rejects the rejection by the S.P.R. of "haunted-house" apparitions and the like—it argues that expectation causes hallucination (either in the individual or, by the help of telepathy, in a group), and he advances a hypothesis of his own which, while it does not exclude telepathy, certainly includes something very like the "astral" theory. First, however, he maintains that a state of expectancy is *more* likely to attain to *true* results than cold detachment; credulity, than scepticism. In love, music, religion, a receptive attitude is wanted, if subtler impressions are to be cognised. Next, he considers the popular evidence for haunted houses "simply overwhelming": the more so because it *is* popular, as of a jury of ordinary men deliberately preferred to skilled specialists. Finally, he recalls that the *spiritual* can "*impress*" the *material*. He quotes relics, medals, and sacramentals generally. He considers that the material object is in some sense impregnated by spirit, to be recognised by people

of strong “faith.” (So we read of saints knowing at once whether an object has been blessed or a wafer consecrated. Clairvoyance and clairsaudience in general correspond to this in the profane departments.) Not only the spirit disengages an *aroma* (a metaphor he is fond of), but material objects can receive *and retain*, and re-emit this third element—spiritual enough to proceed from spirit, material enough to be incorporated with body. Apply this to haunted houses. A scene occurs in which the most violent emotions—anger, say, on the part of a murderer; terror on that of his victim—disengage themselves. “Does it not seem probable that the very walls, and ceiling, and floor, and bedhangings, and furniture should receive a certain impression of the horror? and that they should retain it?” Time passes. Someone, attuned to such emotions, sleeps in the room. From all sides his subconsciousness receives emotional discharges. These force their way up to the intellect, brain, ear, and eye. He “sees a ghost.” He sees, not the souls of slayer or slain, but “the stored-up emotions which the crime generated, presented to him in the very shape in which they were generated.” Benson offers this, without prejudice, as his theory.<sup>1</sup>

Such then is his philosophical attitude towards the preternatural. It rests on a particular theory of Personality, and issues into a practical agnosticism as regards the nature of the phenomena of Christian Science and of ghost-lore, and could do so too in regard to those of

<sup>1</sup> I need not say that it is in no sense original. A vivid presentment of it is given, in fiction, by Mr. Algernon Blackwood. “The Damned” is a story in his *Incredible Adventures*, which has for scene a house built on a site occupied successively by Druid, early British, Roman and monastic inhabitants, and, more recently, by a fanatical Catholic and a rigid Jew. Each set of inhabitants had *believed intensely*, and left the very soil saturated with a mysterious co-efficient of their thought. Of this the actual inhabitants became terribly aware.

spiritualism. Religiously, however, he is able to take up a special attitude towards these, in consequence of the lead given him by the Church, consistently opposed to Spiritualism, on the assumption that spirits are indeed involved, and illicitly involved, in its practice. That he was glad to have this attitude so highly sanctioned does not matter : he would have adopted it out of loyalty even if it had not been so utterly in keeping with what he temperamentally liked. As it was, he lived logically according to it in his public utterances and dealings : he vehemently discouraged all spiritualistic dealings on the part of unauthorised persons ; he followed approved authorities in what he preached or wrote upon it ; he took part, safeguarded in orthodox fashion, in exorcisms more than once. But since his attitude is thus only that of every other priest who takes Spiritualism seriously, there is nothing further to be said about it.

In his literary work he allowed himself far wider scope, and practically regarded as his legitimate instruments for effects all the "evidence" for abnormal psychic experiences or abnormal phenomena which he could collect, whatever its value. In his historical novels this department was not much drawn upon. Certainly you have quite admirable descriptions of unusual psychic states—as of men in ecstasy, or in torture, or at the point of death : Robin upon the rack, in *Come Rack, Come Rope*, may be recalled ; Queen Mary's death, in *The Queen's Tragedy* ; the Maid of Kent is discussed by Thomas More in *The King's Achievement* ; and other examples are too numerous to be catalogued : there are, too, visions, like that of Campion in the novel named after his own words ; there are again and again significant dreams like Lady Maxwell's in *By What Authority* ;

all *Richard Raynal* moves in a magical atmosphere; and there are legends of miracle and divine interposition which are offered as no more than legend. But in the novels of modern life, the abnormal and preternatural abound. Telepathy and “suggestion” run riot in *The Sentimentalists*, where Mr. Rolls is very much of a religious hypnotist: in *The Conventionalists*, Chris Dell, on whom Rolls’s mantle has fallen, plays very directly indeed upon Algy’s subconsciousness: in *None other Gods*, the Supernatural, dwelling in Frank Guiseley’s soul, makes itself as exteriorly manifest as ever will the devil, who, in *The Necromancers*, is to obsess Laurie Baxter. The agnostic doctor and his hard-headed man-servant are utterly upset by Frank’s mere presence. Vague shocks thrill parsons when Frank looks into their eyes; sensations come and go, almost like little clicks and sparks, when they talk to him. The topic of the *Winnowing* is of course unarguable. A man dies, revives, and dies again, and so one must take it or leave it. But, at the end, the panic of the horse who knows his master is dying in South Africa; the calling of his name, heard by the gardener, and the half-caught apparition which worried the lady’s maid, and the psychic pause experienced by Mrs. Weston and Lady Sarah just before the cablegram arrives, are all in the best style of the uncanny. Of the *Mirror of Shalott* is it too much to say that save for its manipulation of the uncanny it is all but negligible? The personages are mere lay figures; the stories take a terrible time to reach their point; there is a little psychic philosophy (Mr. Percival’s tale of the ghostly miners involves the theory of “materialised emotion” which saturates the walls of the shaft and “gives off” images of those who long ago lived and sinned there), a frank recognition of diabolic agencies (as in the very

gruesome story in which the devil passes from the possessed into—not swine this time, but the bread and meat which fell into worms before Fr. Meuron's eyes), and in Fr. Martin's most successful story of the footsteps in the snow. But, all things considered, the outstanding feature of the book is its successful *uncanniness*, and in consequence it is far from reaching the higher levels attainable in the study of the preternatural. The uncanny is not meant to do much more than pleasurably to thrill the nerves, nor does Fr. Benson here achieve much else than to cater most artistically for a refined edition of the folks for whom haunted houses and the like at Exhibitions cater vulgarly. There is, as I said, a good deal of religion in the book and some philosophy, but it is just for the stories that it will be read, and, in any case, the author once more douches the eagerness of readers bent on fastening him down to a confession of belief in these phenomena, by repeated assertions, through his characters, of an agnosticism almost patently his own. Still, there is no stage-property of the uncanny he does not permit himself to use.

But it is in *The Necromancers* that he brings all his heavy artillery to bear on his professed enemy. Here again the uncanny enters, but rises to the heroic level, and achieves the horrible; and I will confess that I can think of no book which reaches so high a pitch of horror, unaided by alien elements such as Mr. Arthur Machen introduces into his *House of Souls*, as this does.

It is the story of a boy over whose soul the satanic personality obtains a temporary triumph, and goes as follows:

Laurence Baxter fell in love with Amy, the daughter of a Baptist grocer. Now Mrs. Baxter, his mother, was a person



of great charm, refinement, and pleasant conventionality, and she felt an added confidence in Divine Providence when Amy died rather suddenly. But the impetuous Laurie (who had become a Catholic at Oxford, and for a short time had meant to be a priest) had been very sincerely infatuated with Amy ; and when Mrs. Stapleton—who went in for New Thought and the Higher Light, and perceived the world in whole and in detail to be but symbolic of the Deeper Unity—radiantly proclaimed (at lunch) that spirits would return from “the other side” and that she herself had spoken with Cardinal Newman, Laurie could not forget this ; and, despite the splendid common sense and Catholic piety of his adopted sister, Maggie Deronnais, who lived with Mrs. Baxter, passionately longed to test the possibilities of Spiritualism in his own case. Amy must come to him.

Now Mrs. Stapleton’s great friend was Lady Laura Bethell, who, “half-emancipated from the grave-clothes of so-called Revelation,” attended All Saints in the morning, and entertained her friends to tea and psychic orgies in Queen’s Gate in the afternoon. Plasmon, milk, and hot water were the favourite foods of herself and Mrs. Stapleton. On them Laurie called, and by them was introduced to Mr. Vincent, the medium, whom Benson deliberately makes as attractive as (for similar reasons of impartiality) he makes Fr. Mahon, the priest near Mrs. Baxter’s, vulgar and unsympathetic. (He gets his own back, if I may say so, over Lady Laura and her friend.) Laurie challenges Vincent, who has but *argued* splendidly. “*Show* me something—now !” Automatic writing is suggested. Laurie sits down, and, to the amazement of the medium himself, passes rapidly into trance. Admirably are portrayed the phases of the lad’s departing consciousness, and his awaken-

ing. It is here that Benson excels. The "uncanny" has entered the book, and will not leave it. For an hour and a half the boy has talked freely with Amy and about her; there is little now the medium and the rather frightened ladies do not know. In Laurie they have a "find," a case of extraordinary susceptibility. Laurie explains the trance and his talk easily enough to himself; hypnotised by Vincent, he had talked only of what he knew, and so on. But he revisits the medium; finds that he had spoken too of what he did not know, but can test; thus, of the sinking and cracking of Amy's grave, which he has not seen: he visits the grave: the facts were as he in trance had asserted them to be. *Amy must have been there, and told him.* Laurie is captured. He will return and return to Queen's Gate. But first, you will find described two scenes of much psychological insight. Benson relates to you Mr. Vincent's state of mind, his certainties and doubts, his attitude to the mental and moral collapses he had seen, to charlatanry, and to religion, from which he perceives he must detach the boy. At greater length and still more subtly you are told of Laurie's mentality at this point; the automatic fading of his Catholicism, and of the climax when, in the fire-lit room, his whole outer soul appears to fall from him like a husk; the subconscious is set free. A "door" in the personality is opened wide, and the Inmost finds an egress. . . . It issues forth, and, after a while, it makes ready for return. Then comes the horror. On the threshold is a Presence, hostile, paralysing. Laurie cannot re-enter his abode. . . . He calls on God; the Presence vanishes; with a rush the Self re-enters its due mansion. But observe, the opened door was no more that merely which would have left the inner Self free to emerge into the ordinary workaday self (which it does,

we will remember, in all normal uprushes of the Sub-conscious), but a second door, according to Mr. Vincent, which not only took the self wholly out of its proper abode into the other world, but left that abode directly open to exterior personalities, one of which in this case not only *could*, but *did*, beleaguer the threshold in view of ultimate invasion and possession. Had Laurie's cry to God (he was still sufficiently in touch with God to be able to cry to Him) not evicted the Watcher on the Threshold, the Self might never have been able to return : it would have been “lost” ; the “man” would have been inhabited by a Devil.

Laurie Baxter, undeterred, revisits Lady Laura. A séance is started : “materialisation” is being sought after. The preliminaries are over : silence descends.

At this point Benson inserts a chapter which has become famous. The cat, perambulant upon the garden wall, meets and woos his mate. But from the curtained window below them a horror issues which first freezes the animals into sheer paralysis, and then lashes them into frenzy and flight. . . . I have heard it authoritatively stated that this episode, whose dramatic value is so incomparable, was inserted at the request of another, and was, in fact, written as sheer padding. Be that as it may, it produces the emotional pause of which I have spoken above, and is one of the “moments” of the book.<sup>1</sup>

The séance proceeds, and is successful. The vision shows itself ; it condenses : it is Amy. Laurie has seen, and believes. The gulf is bridged. Religion ? It has

<sup>1</sup> It is, save that uncanniness replaces the most delicate and playful humour, exactly parallel to the episode of the marmot, peacefully feeding, and then scared by the Alpine party, on p. 61 of *The Coward*. Nothing more graceful than this uncalled-for excursion into sheer comedy can be imagined : nothing more sinister than the episode of the cats. Nothing, again, more whimsically mystical than that of the bees, in *Richard Raynal*, p. 202 *sqq.*

become shadowy enough. Here is all the other-world he wants. Laurie is absorbed ; his work suffers. Mr. Morton, with whom he reads law, grows anxious, argues (uselessly) with Laurie ; writes to Miss Deronnais ; recommends the advice of an ex-spiritualist, Mr. Cathcart.<sup>1</sup>

Maggie wrote to Cathcart, who met Laurie, called on Lady Laura, and tried to hint to her that the boy was on the verge of one of those appalling catastrophes known to the spiritualist adepts. Vincent appears, reassures Lady Laura, and defeats Cathcart.

The night of the supreme experiment arrives. Again Benson makes us halt ; describes with astonishing knowledge and humour the housekeeper's room and its conversation, horribly broken into by the frantic ringing of the drawing-room bell. In that drawing-room frightful things have passed. The hateful silence, that even of the brain, has returned ; the apparition comes ; Laurie makes a mad dash forward and grasps Amy. She vanishes ; Vincent falls half-dead, and Laurie departs . . . but an altered Laurie, striking terror into his hostess and her friend. Cathcart meets him, diagnoses his case, labels it (for the public eye) as " threatened insanity," and calls on Maggie, in whose Catholic faith he hopes to win salvation for the boy, for Laurie is to visit Mrs. Baxter, and will meet her there.

Once more, through the medium of the commonplace, almost the grotesque, Benson achieves a supreme effect. The good grocer's wife, on Easter Saturday evening, when the boy who so nearly married Amy is to arrive

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shane Leslie says somewhere that Cathcart is the only one of his characters whose name can be found in the Catholic *Who's Who*. That is in a sense true ; but here the professed portrait is as unlike the original as many of his pictures are like persons whom he would not confess he was trying to reproduce.

at home, visits her dead daughter's room, to see to the linen and the furniture. As she kneels there at the linen drawer, the trotting hoofs and the wheels of Laurie's distant dog-cart break the silence. Fear comes on her—why, she cannot tell. . . . Every beat of the hoof, every grind of the nearing wheel, intensify the panic ; and as the cart bearing the boy, in whose soul the Devil sits, crashes past the house, she sinks in a faint.

Laurie arrives : his mother is ill in bed : Maggie (obedient to Cathcart) welcomes him. From his horrible eyes That peers out which is he, yet not he, and terror keeps pace with his approach. Cathcart is in the village. He meets the girl. “Courage and love” is his last advice to her. For one moment, Laurie has looked in at his mother's door : here is another “moment” in the book. The hating, cruel eyes fixed on his mother, his voiceless withdrawal, have chilled every reader's nerves. He passes to the smoking-room ; Maggie follows him. She will still believe that Laurie is “there” underneath ; the Devil is not fully tenant of that body yet : she still can evict him if she is brave enough, and if she loves enough. I will not attempt to outline the events of that appalling night, and the fight between the opposing ultimate Powers present in that room. For it is Benson's doctrine, that the Spirit of Christ, personally indwelling within the Catholic girl's soul, was amply strong enough to expel the satanic tenant of the soul of Laurie. Only, the co-operation of her purity and prayer was exacted of her ; and from the frightful assault made now upon them she emerged victorious, but through martyrdom. With the Easter dawn, Christ rose again in Laurie.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Many have regretted the epilogue as an anticlimax : in it Maggie rather dully relates these events, of which she cannot remember much, to a girl-friend,

Now, there is much in this which from the special point of this chapter may be disregarded. Thus, the character drawing. Maggie Deronnais is scarcely alive: she is the girl who, in this case, "helps," not hinders, the conversion. Mr. Cathcart is the Mr. Rolls of *The Sentimentalists* and the Mr. Morpeth of *Initiation*. Fr. Mahon is a foil, to Mrs. Stapleton, if you will, as charming an apostle (if rather silly) as he was unattractive (and very stupid). Laurie is simply the necessary stuff for the theory's incarnation. But as usual, old Mrs. Baxter is perfection: several subordinates (the clergyman; Mrs. Nugent) are delightfully put in: the caustic humour flickers, and shrivels all it touches—even when at its kindest, in the housekeeper's room. The atmospheres are marvellously caught and given. But certainly, for dramatic horror, the book is hard to equal, and it is not astonishing that, more than any of Benson's novels, save *The Sentimentalists*, it was chosen for dramatisation.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Maurice Hewlett, I daresay, in, for example, the *Lore of Proserpine*, catches the authentic note of the fantastic; Mr. Richard Middleton put a quite special quaintness in his *Ghost Ship*, so at ease was he with the preternatural; and doubtless there are scores of other names which Benson here evokes for our comparison (Edgar Allan Poe's, for instance, whom we at once reject, save as contrast, so far has modern taste travelled from his method and style: as literature, he cannot, doubtless, die, but he no more really shocks the nerves); only, I think, Mr. Henry James, R. L. Stevenson, and Mr. Arthur and expresses her own inability to arrive at any very definite conclusion about them. Perhaps Mgr. Benson was wise thus to douche our emotionalism: dramatically, of course, the book suffers by ending on this note of almost flippant and very comfortable agnosticism.

<sup>1</sup> I expect Mr. Chesterton's *Magic* would, however, have interfered with any succès de surprise.

Machen are left, after repeated sifting. Stevenson again and again has the unerring touch of the uncannily horrible, as in *The Dynamiters* and the *New Arabian Nights*; but there the plot is wholly concerned with human crime; Benson carries you right out into a world of devils. Mr. Machen, and even Mr. James (in *The Turning of the Screw*) gain many of their effects by a suggestion of monstrous lusts and instincts hideously perverted. Benson, by keeping the frenzied reaction of the flesh no more than hinted in his work, places his horrible sins in a spiritual sphere, and they are but the more horrible for their quasi-purity: conversely, he stages the whole drama in a relentlessly commonplace *mise en scène*, and does not profit by Mr. Machen's vivid and fantastic backgrounds. Such then was Benson's method of dealing with the preternatural, and by means of it he achieved a startling triumph.

Intellectually, he was eminently cautious; religiously, he was orthodox; in literature, dramatic, and ready to use any offered material, yet with reticence and subtlety: temperamentally, he ran riot after the mysterious and occult.

After all, consider his heredity. His father founded a Ghost Society; Professor Henry Sidgwick founded the Society for Psychical Research. Mrs. Sidgwick, his aunt, is its President; Mrs. Benson's own psychic experiences were considerable; the transcendental preoccupation of Hugh's two brothers are familiar to all readers of their books. Moreover, dreams of the most coherent and articulate description haunt the active brains of this family, over which sleep seems to settle in but the finest film; and Hugh's letters are full of dreams related to him and by

him. Moreover, he distinguished the qualities of dreams, and once wrote thus :

*Dec. 5, 1903.*—[I write partly because] I had a long dream about you last night. Do you know the kind of dream that makes one feel as if one had seen in reality the person one dreams about, and which almost obliges one to write to them ?

He forgets the details, save that his correspondent was well and happy.

But his dreams were not usually, even when he was "dreaming true," as the Duchess of Towers taught Peter Ibbetson to do, "bright and silver," like those that nurtured the infancy of Shelley's solitary poet. His visions harassed him, and his sleep was often no rest to him, and far too brief.

From childhood he caressed the uncanny. The boy who was so terrified of dark rooms, with their surmised blood-pools and corpses, would sit with his brother and sister and imitate mechanically the phenomena of *séances*. In London he is captured by Theosophy, at Cambridge by Swedenborg, and he must be warned off mesmerism by his mother. There, too, he elects the suicide's room, with the bloodstain beneath the bed ; and "plays ghosts," to his own terror, in the Fellows' garden of King's.

Later, the affair becomes a passion ; wherever a haunted room is heard of, thither he flies, and passes terror-stricken nights, listening to "footsteps," and springing from bed in an agony of fear. Everywhere haunted rooms encounter him : near Mirfield ; at Naples ; in his own house at Hare Street ; on his visits, at romantic Oxburgh as at ruthlessly modern Brighton.

Brockley Court, near Bristol, is a haunted house of peculiar interest, and Benson spent, I gather, at least three



nights there, once with Mr. James Durham of Cromer Grange, Norfolk, and Mr. John Lambton, once alone with the Duke of Newcastle, and once with the Duke and Lord Halifax. Mr. James Durham, who with Lady Agnes Durham had already had experience of Brockley Court, has kindly sent me the following account of his visit :

CROMER GRANGE, NORFOLK.

The caretaker from the house was awaiting us and opened the doors. I must say it is a ghostly old place ; lying off the road, and so intensely deserted. We shut ourselves in, taking among other things one of the large motor lamps. We went all over the house, which is perfectly empty, and we eventually installed ourselves in the bedroom on the right of the hall door on the first floor ; the alcove where the bed would stand has apparently had its floor taken up, for there was a large hole. As midnight approached we stopped playing cards whereby we had beguiled the time, and Hugh put on his stole, and we awaited in silence anything that might be manifested to us.

Nothing happened, and after waiting till past two we departed.

Benson wrote to Mr. Durham in 1909 :

I don't like Rome this year at all. There's the exhibition in the air ; there is an extract of anti-clericalism floating in the streets ; and, considering the past, the Italian citizens are astonishingly uncivilised. I am sure Berlin is much nicer [. . .] I have been down to Brockley again, you know : for two nights : and said Mass in the haunted room. Nothing whatever happened, except some footsteps ; and I don't count them much. An electric torch also refused to burn for a while. Do you remember the lamp ?

I had been convinced that Mgr. Benson never had any direct personal experiences of other-world phenomena, when I was editing the Catholic Truth series of lectures on the History of Religions mentioned above. Mgr.

Benson had written on Spiritualism : the paper was much too short and also too dogmatic, I felt, to carry conviction, save if its assertions should be backed by much objective evidence. I indicated a number of places at which I asked him to insert examples, if possible, from his own experience. He added a few without references, all of which, if I remember aright, I tracked down to Mr. Raupert's books.<sup>1</sup>

I thought Mgr. Benson might possibly be observing a natural reticence ; but later on both the Duke of Newcastle and Lord Halifax have assured me that their expeditions remained fruitless, and that to their knowledge Benson never did "see" anything. Considerably later (as late as 1913) he answered Miss A. Essington Nelson, whose experience in this matter was wider than his, that neither at Hare Street (where he purposely slept for two years in his haunted room) nor anywhere else had he ever seen anything, though he knew what it was to *feel* an atmosphere "charged with intelligence," in which *others* would probably have seen things.

Finally, Mrs. St. John Saunders very kindly writes to me :

During a conversation ranging from Possession, Lunacy, and Exorcism to "appearances," &c., the subject of Ghost experiences came up, and I asked Mgr. if he had actually seen or heard anything of the kind. He replied most regretfully that though he had visited many haunted places, slept in rooms, &c., he had only had one experience, and that scarcely worth mentioning. On being pressed to relate it, he said he was once staying in a country house, and was given a very ordinary room ;

<sup>1</sup> Either he or I added those from Mr. Everard Feilding, who again and again has told me that none of the phenomena he has experienced, and the objective validity of which I cannot see any way to dispute, convince him finally of a *necessarily* spiritual origin.

he woke up in the night with a sense of great oppression, and this increased till it became almost unbearable, and he fancied the darkness must at any moment become materialised. He described this terrifying atmosphere at great length, and worked us all up to a great pitch, then stopped suddenly. "What did you do, Father?" we all said, expecting at least an exorcism. He replied very gravely: "I put my head under the clothes and went to sleep *at once*." One lady said: "How could you do that; weren't you too frightened?" "No," said he, twinkling with enjoyment; "I was much too frightened *to stay awake!*" After that anticlimax he went on to say that he described the feeling to his neighbour at breakfast the next day, and was told that the room *had* the reputation of being haunted by a suicide, and that others had seen a terrifying face; but he added, "I *saw* nothing," and then quite mournfully, "Not even my own ghost at home." I asked him if any one had seen it? and he said "Yes; a nice prize-fighter who was staying with me. I put him in the room, and he saw the old woman, and was terrified," and he seemed quite envious of his guest!

Hence it is not astonishing that as late as mid-1914 he declared himself more than once to be still "sitting on the hedge" with regard to the evidence for phenomena; met cases by two or three theories; but declared emphatically that Spiritualism as a whole was the backstairs to the unknowable, and led inevitably to disaster.

Still, his experiments were endless, though not wholly indiscriminate. None the less, they led him into quite regrettable associations.

"I am so much interested," he once wrote in 1904, "[in occult things] that I am quite frightened of them. Once upon a time I hypnotised a good deal; but haven't done it for years. I have also seen odd things done with a crystal; but have no faculty for that. . . . Did I ever tell you that you were right," he continues later, "in what you said about my power to cure by touch in some cases? You were right . . . (but) I have only cured small things, such as neuralgia, and under hypnotism other small things, physical or moral."

To the same friend he wrote :

Astrology. The style is so terrible that at present it dazzles me. I should like to make some experiments. But the sign business seems to me remarkable. So far as one can test it, it seems true. I want to know how to cast a horoscope ; where can I learn that ? Does it involve complicated matter this ? How can I get an Ephemeris ?

One of the most singular "quests" on which circumstances caused him to embark was that of the Holy Grail, which was believed to have been found at Glastonbury. As the quest never came to anything, and as the distinguished historian to whom its *dossier* was entrusted has destroyed it, and as the topic proves to be fruitful only in contradictions, I am dispensed from dealing with it.

A curious little piece of superstition is dated July 26, 1905. He wrote to Mr. Frederick Rolfe :

Have you heard of the events in Paris and Venice this year ? In each case a person put the full name of an enemy into a drawer, purposely ; and the enemy died within six months. It is rather terrible.

Last of all, I will quote from two quite characteristic letters of his, written on Nov. 20 and Dec. 10, 1904, respectively, from Llandaff House :

I have come across such a queer psychical man. I took him to see Aunt Norah one day, and she wants to see him again. He swears he can make a celluloid ball roll towards him, at will ; and is going to do it on Tuesday. But I am a little doubtful. He says he can make it move against a draught from a fan, but I suspect a back-draught in some way.

Here is the experimental schoolboy with the sceptic uppermost.

I have also written a ghost-story for the Christmas Sat. Mag. if we have one—that makes my hair stand up.

I hardly dared to go to sleep last night at all. Booh! It is an account of an exorcism.<sup>1</sup>

Here is the schoolboy determined that his flesh shall creep, and to make it creep himself if he can get no one to do it for him.

Briefly to sum up this chapter. In complex human creatures, temperament comes first. Benson's temperament was eager, inquisitive, sensitive; open to all that was odd, romantic, and “thrilling” to the nerves. Only the slightest inequality in development is needed to account for a man's seeking a slightly distorted vision of what the perfectly expanded soul should love. Thus we recognise a perverse love in, say, a scholar, for the ingenious and the “silver”; in an artist, for clashing tones or exaggerated poses (provided they do not destroy the ideal they travesty); the faintest touch of caricature, of wrongness, is sweet to many whose sensitiveness is not yet morbid, but not wholly inspired with a fullness of health. All boys are unequally developed, and nearly all boys love, by fits and starts, the hideous, the horrible, ghosts, and even cruelty. Benson never ceased, in many ways, to be a boy. He was still growing, nearly to the end, and had all the growing-pains and recognised efforts and strains of adolescence. Therefore the absurd and the ugly in every department had its fascination for him, and he could not resist, in this particular department, the summons of the weird. But his inequalities were due, not to defective life, but to a vital impulse unusually leaping and vigorous. Hence he never collapsed into the sickly, but was able, on the one hand, to laugh at himself, and on the other to control himself. Hence, too, intellectually, he worked out theories (to which he clung not one whit too closely; *they* were

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Mirror of Shalott*. Father Meuron's Tale.

not what he primarily cared for) which should justify himself to himself in acting as he wanted to: and in the terribly responsible area of religion he was absolutely ready to embrace that guidance of the Church which on the one hand harmonised most exactly with what he liked to believe, and on the other checked him, and caused him, quite relentlessly, to check others, when he no less than the Church, but more (very likely) than they, perceived the danger-zone.

Outside, then, the religious and the intellectual spheres, he allowed himself all the pleasures of the game, restricting himself by laws of "form" only when he was acting as an artist.

But I would suggest one final consideration.

All his life Hugh Benson was followed continuously, in his mind, by the awareness of a Fear. I will try to explain this more accurately, if possible, in a later chapter; but how to explain Fear—Fear, that is, *as such*, and not fear of this or that; Fear which is essentially the "denying of the succours of thought"—it is hard to see. Now the Greeks, in certain circumstances and on certain occasions, deliberately caused themselves to fear. Their tragedies were described by Aristotle, in a phrase created to torment and delight whole centuries of commentators, as a Purge of Fear and Pity. Some at least have held that the philosopher believed all human creatures to be the better for periodical explosions of those two passions. They are to be conceived, almost, as swelling within the soul until they need an outburst, else they will fester and slay the soul, or break forth harmfully. A harmless occasion for their externalising was therefore engineered for them. I would suggest that Benson, probably quite unconsciously, provided himself with all sorts of strange oppor-

tunities for fear, that his *fearing faculty*, so to say, might have sufficient exercise, and leave him in regard to all that really mattered more at peace. If we can agree to this, we shall see him, even at his most frivolous and almost vexing, engaged in laying one ghost by the evocation of another, and, all his life, a haunted man. Here not least, I mean in this spectacle of a really brave man exorcising the phantoms of his soul by spells that half were jests, is to be found one element of that pathos which always, to my feeling, softens the contours of his portrait.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARTIST

He came and took me by the hand  
Up to a red rose tree,  
He kept His meaning to Himself  
But gave a rose to me.

I did not pray Him to lay bare  
The mystery to me,  
Enough, the rose was Heaven to smell,  
And His own face to see.

RALPH HODGSON.

BY Art, I mean, when writing of Hugh Benson, the expression of life. In proportion as life energises freely, it issues into rhythm. The fullest art, then, will be the most rhythmical. Life, however, never reveals itself completely to any finite intelligence ; therefore the perfect rhythm can never be achieved by any method of expression ; and it cannot, in consequence, be declared that this or that is bad art, simply because a rhythmic form is broken or incomplete. Probably perfect beauty would be meaningless to us. We demand, at least, contrast ; and it is at anyrate the prerogative of a subtler sense and a keener insight to detect the elements of beauty, because of rhythm, where the grosser imagination merely fails to notice anything but the imperfect and, therefore, the ugly. Hence the relatively ugly may be legitimate as material for an artist ; and even when it is the result of his labours, it may be held to be a true artistic product.

Again, since the "really Real" is spiritual, and the spiritual is the purposeful, therefore the best art, as expres-



sive of the best and most real life, is the most purposeful, and "art for art's sake," is, in the ordinary meaning attached to that dictum, which implies that the artist paints or writes or gesticulates purely from unpurposeful impulse, an idle saying.<sup>1</sup> Still, it is no doubt true that the supreme artist, who can trust himself, will be able to allow his instinct scope, certain that it will not carry him aside from, or set him in conflict with, the tremendous purpose of that ultimate Spirit with which he knows himself in communion. He can permit, therefore, his individual purpose to remain implicit, undetailed even to himself; in his subconsciousness, Benson would have said. Similarly the more profoundly religious a man is, the less, I suppose, need he laboriously conform each of his actions to a deliberately stated rule. He can trust to the impetus of the love within him; *Ama, et fac quod vis*. The saint and the artist exult in the offered rose: its fragrance is a breath of Heaven to them; in its beauty is God's face; but they need neither of them academically recall how God created it, preserved it, transcends it, is symbolised by it, and the like; the two planes interpenetrate; each from within illuminates the other; in one massive motion of their consciousness, artist and saint envelop, each in his degree, both heaven and earth. Thus, at anyrate, Benson perceived the facts. And, to revert for a moment to what I said above, it may be possible that their inclusive vision springs best for them at sight of the *wild-rose*; even of the poor frost-bitten, blackened rose, which has tried so hard to realise itself out in the cold. "Only the Master," says Mr. Locke of Paragot and

<sup>1</sup> An article of extremely sound criticism, which appeared in the *Ampleforth Journal* for January 1915, by Mr. J. L. Hope, reminds us that precisely for the lack of didactic purpose, Mr. Matthew Arnold denies to Chaucer the title of a great master. Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton had a message to deliver—Chaucer, only a good story to tell.

his disreputable friends, "could make what was not utterly infamous out of them ;" and a master-artist, by faith and hope and love, can discover and cherish, and finally recreate what is best, in that which to the duller eye and in the weaker hand is wasted.

Thus to deny to Benson the name of artist, as I have heard many do, because he portrays the ugly, that is, the imperfect, even the distorted, and that, almost by preference, may be a grave error ; it is so, if he chose these subjects not because he found the ugliness as such congenial, but because he perceived, less what the thing was, than what it was "meant to be," as the wise Greek definition has it ; and this, since his whole theory is one of vocation, is what he indeed did contemplate. Hence in his books you perceive no merely finished beauty, but growth, and his is a philosophy of Becoming.

Again, you must not condemn him if in his literary work you everywhere see purpose. Frankly, he meant to help.

In all history he maintained that God could there be detected "at His work and at His labour till the evening."

"To one," he writes, "who has a grasp of Catholic history, and so on, it is simply enchanting to see how the purpose of God runs through it all."

Nor did he hesitate to apply this directly to the possibilities of English history, in particular as he knew and could relate it. "It is extraordinary," he said in 1905, "how English people have been misinformed as to facts ; and they are generally so generous in considering other points of view that it seems well worth one's while to do what one can." And he argued cleverly on behalf of the "Catholic point of view" in history, in partial opposition to, or shall we say supplementing, a thesis of Mr. F. F. Urquhart's, that to write "Catholic History" was

a dangerous occupation, and invited the confusion of opinion with dogma.<sup>1</sup>

And in his modern novels he wanted to reveal modern men and women to themselves, to show them the meaning of their soul *naturaliter Catholica*, inexplicable (in actual fact) save by allowing for God's summons to Catholicism. Herein, I know, he will seem to supply an added proof to the theory of Mr. George Moore, for instance, that no Catholic can write live literature. Mr. Moore, I think, supports this by a notion that Catholic creed and code, being restrictive, must close to an artist certain fields of speculation, kinds of emotion, and methods of expression. In the long run this is false. Catholicism is wholly positive, and includes, by sheer force of definition, all that anywhere exists of true, and therefore of beautiful. All that it excludes, is the destructive; and purposeful Catholic art is, therefore, at the highest point in the scale of values. Nor, in consequence, can it *fear* Beauty. It is true that Newman prayed, amid the tender solicitations of the Spring, to be protected, "lest sights of earth to sin give birth"; but that was because he knew that, for him personally, what held God could often hide Him. The sacramentality of Benson's habitual outlook made it possible for him, as I have often said, to treat the veil not as concealment, but as the normal vesture of the Invisible. Nor did he scorn God's robe because it was but a robe, but honoured it, being God's.

I will say at once that by not trusting sufficiently to the spiritual purpose latent in his sound instinct he did in practice injure the artistry of his work. Not only because at times the construction of the story, its ordered

<sup>1</sup> These articles appeared in the *Crucible* for September and December 1906, a Catholic Magazine for the Higher Education of Women, edited by Miss Margaret Fletcher. All must deplore its disappearance.

incidents, its scheme and climax are too obvious, but because, aiming to "help," say, one particular class of person, he was careless in such parts of the book as did not make directly for this end, and, as I have already shown, he confessed as much. But the true artist loves and respects every ounce of his material, every detail of his instruments; and even such parts of his canvas as do not receive his concentrated detail-work, are *artistically*, not carelessly, left but "indicated." An allied tendency to slapdash, so to say, was shown, I think, increasingly as Benson grew more overworked. He had a way of mounting platforms without thought of what he should say when he got there; and this, not from mystical reliance on a Gospel promise, but half for the fun of the game; almost, out of bravado. Herein lay an undeveloped tendency to think lightly of his audience, and even of his subject, and even of himself. His fault lay, therefore, not in being purposeful, but by being at times content with a circumscribed purpose and a second-rate production.

So, if we are to deny to him a front rank among artists, that will not be because he painted the ugly, or painted with purpose, in fact, with Catholicising purpose. We may perhaps, however, have to do so because of a certain *externality* of mind to which I have alluded and must try to explain.

It will best be understood from a brief anecdote.

Hugh and a friend were standing on a railway platform at the farther end of which three children were playing.

"What a delightful picture that makes," cried Hugh, arrested, and shading his eyes to admire.

"Is that how you feel it?" asked his companion. "Like a picture, I mean? Out there, at a distance?"

Hugh saw what he meant.

"Oh yes," he answered. "It's always like that, for me. I see it outside me. Like a picture. With a frame round it."

"Oh dear!" cried the other. "Now *I'm there*. I'm the thing itself, when I enjoy it. I *am* that little girl."

"No," said Hugh, a little sadly; "I'm an onlooker."

Now it is emphatically not true that Hugh was always external to what he wrote about; he had a great power of identifying himself with certain moods of some classes of his characters, or of nature, and I maintain that it is always very clear where this happens. His externality, moreover, was not the chill aloofness of that very perfect romanticist, Flaubert; nor that supreme detachment which enables a M. Anatole France so cynically to relate the behaviour and mental processes of his characters that he leaves the reader, at the end, on a ground strewn with the corpses of whatever principles his men and women claimed to live by. Benson was not cynical, though he easily might have been; and he was not merely detached and out of vital contact, as an artist has sometimes to make himself if he is to preserve his individuality and *handle* his material. But he undoubtedly was half his time content with the outside of things, or at least with what of their interior might be described by an outside observer. In a criticism which I can no longer trace, I have seen this attitude illustrated by an apt reference to two passages in *A Winnowing*.

Hugh Benson is describing Mr. Fakenham. He catalogues his features, his clothes, his history.

"I love contemplating people of this kind," he proceeds, "because the subject is so endless and evasive. I have no certainty of what Mr. Fakenham thinks about, but I am stimulated by him to form unverifiable conjectures. Thoughts undoubtedly pass through his mind beyond those to which he gives expression, but I have no idea what they

are. . . . He lives, and he will die; and as to what he will do then not even I dare to form conjectures of any kind. . . . I wish now to describe his appearance this morning—not that anything depends upon it . . . I wish only to gaze upon him for a minute or two.”

And later he will say, after a description, recalling Balzac for its minuteness, of Jim Fakenham’s bedroom, its furniture, his clothes, his bed :

I love Jim—as I have said before—at least I love, mentally, to walk round him, and look at him, and paw him with reverential fingers. He is so perfectly finished, so completely true to type, so utterly contented.

Further, Benson portrays in this book a certain Lady Carberry for whom he has a dislike amounting to a savage hatred : he lays aside his whip and takes a cudgel. He downright abuses her, her shape, her faculties, her clothes, her phrases. “Why,” he cries furiously, “are such things permitted?” “The only possible way of tolerating her,” he avows, “was to regard her from a humorous point of view ; *to elicit characteristic remarks* and reckon them up afterwards—if possible in the company of a sympathiser ; *to take one’s seat, so to speak, in the front row and look on at the play.* . . .”

Now is that reverent to one’s fellow-man? Is that really to be suffered at all? After all, there was a soul there ; and before even a starving and twisted soul, one should be on one’s knees. To leave the ethics of the case, however, as sheer artist’s work I doubt if it was the best that could be done. He was neither getting nor giving all that was possible. There *was* life there, and he was not expressing it, surely, as he might have. Lady Carberry, even, must have felt bewildered at times ; lonely, perhaps : there must have been, in her moods, some moments of dismay ;

Benson, who believed in the immediate interaction of souls, could have succeeded, surely, in giving her a little warmth of love, and his picture would have been by so much the more masterly.

It is in general in his portraiture of women that his externality seems to me most marked. Here is what one can never prove to another, especially as Benson knew a number of rules about feminine psychology quite remarkably well. He recognised this himself, and said so frankly. He said he did not personally understand women in the least, but just applied the rules. He could, up to a point, *phonograph* (so to say) feminine turns of speech, and he declared that he made women's minds move as he thought they ought to, on his principles; and he owned up quite readily to the criticism (was it not in the Literary Supplement of the *Times*?) that he inserted these characters into his books almost without meaning them to be more than hindrances or helps to whatever vocation he had decided his "hero" ought to have. Anyhow, believing as he did that all human creatures fall into *types*, and that having once settled what type a man or woman belongs to, you know all about him or her, and can prophesy what, left to themselves, they are certain to do next, he felt no compunction about acting as I have said. This externalism shows itself markedly in his love scenes, which, successful as they may be, are none the less "outside" studies. He said this, too, explicitly to a friend who questioned him. "I make him do," he said, (of Algy Banister, I think) "what I suppose he probably would." There was no interior impulse which set the actors moving spontaneously as in parts of certain books where he really lost himself in his story.

I say this because he thought it himself, and I am sure wished it to be recognised, and not because he would

agree, for instance, that he did not depict what he called "nice" girls. To some friends who asked him why he did not do so, he answered, aggrieved, "Oh, but I do. Lady Sarah, in *A Winnowing*—don't you think *she's* nice?" Now nobody could be satisfied with a Lady Sarah, except, as I said, just as a finished specimen of a type. Perhaps, however, none ever did come up to the standard of the women in *By What Authority?* Isabel and Mary Corbet are wholly charming. And the *older* women, as I have emphasized, are beautifully and lovingly drawn: Lady Maxwell, Mistress Torridon; Maggie Brent; Queen Mary. But there are quite delicious love-episodes,—Val Medd's, for instance, in *The Coward*—Frank Guiseley's, in *None Other Gods*. Not Algy's, if I may be allowed to think so, in *The Conventionalists*. But how grateful should we be to this priest who was not afraid to cast a halo of infinite charm and sweetness about the love-affairs of Percy Brandreth-Smith and Miss Gladys Farham, the actress. Here are several chivalries. Not Benson will laugh at the "calf-loves" of stage-stricken youth; nor will he sneer at the suggestion that the affection felt by a member of a maligned profession for the adorer down there in the stalls may be sincere. Benson's boys, when they fall in love, are all the better for it; and better was Gladys Farham, till, jilted by the youth, who had grown important and got his head well turned, she found nothing left for her consolation but James Marridon and his yacht.

In fine, I trust that I have said nothing which may indicate that Benson, in actual life, could not put himself into close contact with souls. His untaught sureness of touch, his frequently immediate understanding, show that he did so, and this is the more wonderful considering how often his reasoned appreciations or imaginative assessments



of character were wrong. Nor, it will be seen below, do I deny that even for the artist a certain hardness in the temperament may be necessary, which shall prevent him so identifying himself with his subject as to sacrifice his own personality to it. It remains then that, on the whole, Hugh Benson painted life rather as observed, than as lived ; that sometimes, though not normally, he really wrote of it from within ; that when he did so, he had put himself "inside" owing to the lessening, in some way, of pain. Here, then, he will best be understood by one who himself has suffered. There is a little dialogue in one of Mr. Bernard Capes's novels<sup>1</sup> where the inexperienced artist offers his strange, gloomy rendering of a brilliant landscape—so untruthful to the vulgar eye—to the appreciation of a friend :

"What do you think of it?"

"Distorted, of course."

"Yes, distorted. But you recognise the underlying truth?"

"As you see it—yes."

"Do not you, a fellow-sufferer, see it so?"

For Mr. Capes's artist, the sixth sense, aroused by suffering, and called love, perceived only gloom in the bright world, and disaster. It need not, though, be so; and I would say that Benson, in his hours of love born of suffering, saw life from within, and saw it glorious, not gloomy, and expressed it far more truly than when he painted, as normally, his outside pictures uncanny in their accuracy of detail.

As to his power of appreciating sheer beauty and his readiness to do so, you have, as preliminaries, his extreme keenness of sense, and his theory. The theory you will find in a letter which I shall quote in a moment: his

<sup>1</sup> *The House of Many Voices.*

keenness of sensation is revealed by a hundred touches put in by him with great spontaneity. His sense of smell was as developed as Zola's must have been. He noticed, and commented on, not only the shape of hands, but their scent. And I will refer to the paragraph in *Initiation*, which he will have loved because it shocked people a little, in which the dogs Jack and Jill are allowed to lick the insides of the coffee-cups clean of sugar provided the small boy Jim dirtied them safely afterwards. It was Jim's peculiar delight, "because it was so beastly," to smell those cups after the dogs had licked them ; and indeed "the odour of coffee and dog mixed is as startling as a chord crashed on the piano." He is fond of watching the modification of colours by changing lights : thus, for Marion Tenterden, before dawn, "the yews with all their blackness glowed as through a very fine grey veil ; the grass was of the tone of the very veil itself." See how there is nothing he will not dare ; the blackness "glows" ; the light, although so grey, is the subtlest of illuminants ; he sees each blade of grass to stand "detached and single," personally visible as never in broad daylight. And he will without hesitating translate one sense into terms of another, music into colour, diffused sensation into concentrated taste, and *bitter-sweet* is an adjective applied again and again to spiritual states. Also in all things he observes motion : he can see, still at that hour of dawn, that "the few leaves, fallen since last night, were already upright and rigid in *the beginning of their journey underground*." That is an astonishing piece of observation. Even the motionless, so swiftly will his eye and brain travel along its lines, appears to move. His use of the word *drip* is worth separate attention. The priest's chasuble *drips* from his shoulders during Queen Mary's Mass, as Benson follows rapidly its shimmering silken

shadows ; the cat's tail, in *The Necromancers*, drips blackly from the wall he sits upon. And so often is this found, that I feel sure that when, somewhere in *Loneliness*, a mantle *dipped* from the wearer's shoulders, that is an error due to the hasty revision of that story, and that Benson still wrote, or meant to write, *dripped*.

I have purposely chosen these relatively fantastic points for a brief allusion, for it were childish to labour the obvious and insist that Benson saw and interconnected with quick eye and brain all that nature showed him, and painted it in at once with detail and with a broad impressionism, using, like a true artist, a brush together loose and sure. Even in the actual oil painting, which he took up rather suddenly towards the end of his life, he did this ; and his sketches (chiefly of Hare Street and its immediate neighbourhood) are not unworthy of his brother's beautiful dining-room at Cambridge. There is in them a width of *effect*, a value of colour, and a sureness of perspective, which altogether (I confess) surprised me, having expected to find in them no more than courageous experiments in an unaccustomed medium, expressive rather of the painter's own vigorous vitality than of that which lit up for him his vision. However, he has in all this reached a real *interpretation*. Real reality has impressed him ; and that is the life, and not merely his own subjectivity, which he has conveyed.

As for his practical theory in the use of beauty, he was, as I have said, unafraid lest he should lose the God who came to him veiled thus in light and sound. "Art," as he says in the *Pariah*, "is religion in solution." He had no difficulty, so to say, in "precipitating" the divine. Yet, as a good priest should be, he was singularly cautious, robust as was his brain, in the drinking of large draughts of loveliness.

"I will tell you frankly," he once wrote to a friend, "that I am amazed at your moral poise, and admire it myself. You have an extraordinary love of beauty, and do not seem to find it perilous. You walk on the very knife edge, and do not seem to be giddy. . . . I like enormously the picture of a man who has a very keen perception and is yet pure. Of course, I think that many people cannot follow that way ; it is too strait, but I have not the smallest doubt that it is the highest way, and have known quite enough people who do follow it. Yet I never know how far one may preach it.

"Again, I am very much impressed by something that is a kind of parallel to that, and that is the existence in a man of a keen perception of the human defects of the Church and a pure faith at the same time. That again, in the theological plane, seems to me the highest way, and to have exactly the same precipices.

"In fact, in morals and faith and politics a man like —— appears to me like a man who is always walking on a knife-edge—*une arête*—and it is encouraging to see him there, even if one is on the dusty road oneself.

"Of course, the secret of the balance is simplicity, and that is, I suppose, the hardest of all virtues to reach by effort. One is made both envious and ambitious when one sees it."

Himself, he would follow the stricter road :

For sheer dull morals I take my orders, as I take my faith, from the Catholic Church. Don't you? I have a kind of passion for dull facts ; I admire a man who lives in uninspiring duty as immensely as I admire an OX ; and I deny with all my power that a man's sense of beauty is identical with that heavenly thing ; hence while certainly the Beautiful is the Good, one's own conception of the Beautiful is not at all the same as one's own conception of the Good, still less with the Good itself. Therefore, I disagree profoundly with those who say that what they think to be beautiful is bound to be right.

On the other side, I am sorrier than I can say, and without a TOUCH of superiority, for the man who is led wrong by beauty. He is like leaves—I cannot bear to see

such a whirling fall ; and how many there are ! They fly so exquisitely on rosy wings so far above me ; and then, without warning, they are in the mud flats. If only they will understand that they are in the mud, and that they are ugly and shattered—oh, what won't I do ?—muddy myself, suffer shame—anything. But I despair when they insist on looking at their broken wings and saying how lovely they are ; when they declare there is no mud, and that the mud itself is lovely too, or that it is better to fly and fall than not to fly.

A very direct expression of life is acting. It is more closely allied to Benson's main work of novel writing than is music, therefore I place it next, though I confess that in this department not only knowledge of technique was lacking in him, but sheer talent was denied to him. I have read his three complete plays, the dramatisation of *The Necromancers* (which was carried through for him by Mr. James Percival Head), and a fragmentary play ; and I remain convinced, as are his literary agents, that their publication would add nothing at all to his repute. No man expects that all he writes will be made public, nor (probably) wishes it. These relics, therefore, may be left where they are. About his attitude, however, towards the stage, and the short published plays, and his feeling for acting generally, a few words may be said.

"Had Hugh not been a priest," a friend of his once said to me, "what an actor he might have made." The occasion of this remark was a particular display of that exquisite courtesy, with which he would meet a person who bored him, in reality, to exasperation. Whether or no he could have been, in the general sense, an actor, may be doubted ; if only because he had not the enormous staying power which that vocation demands ; and because,

for all his nervous sensibility, there were a number of moods and characters with which he could not at all identify himself, save, most nearly, in caricature. But from the outset, the dramatic tendency was noticeable in him. The marionette plays of *Lis Escop* and *Addington* are only the more obvious of many symptoms. The tendency to dress up, the joy in violet cassocks, and Japanese costumes, academic hoods, even: the delight in Cardinals' geranium red; the glee in the little patch of purple at the collar, to obtain which, he once (with a whimsical exaggeration) had declared, you must so thoroughly damn your soul—testify throughout his life to a mingled love of ceremony and of masquerade. Fortunately, when he put on his purple, he was, as he reflected with sincere satisfaction, the “real thing” all the time.

At Eton we heard of monkish robes and at Cambridge of masked charades, of Greek choruses, and feminine rôles sustained with delighted burlesque. And immediately after ordination the time of outright dramatic creation has begun. There was a play at the Eton mission spoken of already, while it is by the kindness of the Rev. E. H. Stewart, now vicar of Kensing, that I have been able to see the librettos of the two children's plays composed by Benson while he was curate there.

The more elaborate is *Jack the Giant Killer*, performed four times altogether, from January 4th to 7th. It was in two acts, of two and three scenes respectively, and followed pantomime tradition with accuracy. There was a comic King, a beautiful Princess, a Fairy of the Night, and so on. The quality of the lyrics on these occasions does not, I suppose, matter much: they are noticeably less pretty than the three fairy songs which he contributed to *The Babes in the Wood*, another play, composed by Mr.

Archibald Marshall, whose own lyrics, it must be confessed, are by far the most musical of all. There was another little play, called, I think, *Princess Dulcie*, of which the choruses are, in the style approved by village theatricals, very topical, and introduce all manner of local names. The music for all of these was composed by Mr. F. D. Marshall, and it must be recognised that here especially, though in other features too, these plays rise a good deal above the normal level of village entertainments.

At Mirfield, we have seen how these performances continued.

After Rome, the "rest cure" for which he sought his mother's house was to be diversified by an Elizabethan garden play, while very soon after his arrival at Cambridge, he began to write little plays, like Wiseman's, for Catholic colleges and schools. Of these, the Nativity play is likely to prove most permanently and widely popular.

The *Mystery Play in Honour of the Nativity of Our Lord* was written at Cambridge under the inspiration of *Everyman* for the convent of St. Mary's there. To its pupils the book is dedicated in an affectionate formula, for whose Latinity Mr. A. C. Benson was in the main responsible. It was acted six times in December 1907 and January 1908, and has since been repeated elsewhere, as at the Cathedral Hall in Westminster, and always with success. It is satisfactory perhaps as being in the main a religious production, and deliberately devoid of that subtle literary flavour which pervades, for instance, Mr. Laurence Housman's much more perfect little "Nativity" play. Father Benson was very sensitive as to how far the spirit of a modern audience would prove susceptible to the spiritual yet naïve presentment of a great Christian mystery. He had perceived in the success of *Everyman* much to encourage him ; "passion and real-

ism" had from its performance studiously been eliminated; applause was deprecated. Yet the full houses of Catholics and non-Catholics alike were undoubtedly very responsive to what they saw. Carols, from the collection by A. Stainer and the Rev. H. R. Bramley, struck the note Benson wished to preserve throughout. It cannot be denied that he kept very close in more than merely general lines to Mr. Housman. The herald and his prologue are, I suppose, bequests of an older age to both these authors; but Benson's quaint old shepherd Zachary, with his vision, is a good pendant to Mr. Housman's. But the scene in the inn kitchen is quite new, I think; the three merchants are new characters, at least in the modern *personnel* of Christmas, and they afford subtle contrasts to shepherds and kings. Very striking indeed may be the plain chant *Gloria in Excelsis* breaking in upon the carol melodies. Not only does the liturgical cadence bring with it potent and mystical associations, but by means of its novel connection with this miracle play it will be found to have been reanimated and grown more meaningful for one who, having heard it there, rehears it at High Mass. There is a singular charm in the quasi-ecclesiastical air given to the angelic processions, and to the blessing of the folk by the Divine Child, a true Monstrance of God, in Mary's arms, and in Mary's own few words, *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*. In fact the spirit of the mediaeval play is admirably captured and reincarnated for a modern audience, and the "mystery" is very English and very Catholic, which was what Benson hoped. The appendices are as naïve as the book, and display a charming and childlike interest in practical details: simple hints for dresses, properties, scenery, make-up, are given as if they were the author's own discovery. In the midst the name of Huysmans blossoms suddenly, like an exotic in a clover-



field. On the whole, I daresay that Benson's directions, making the play into a series of meditations rather than of dramatic situations and developments, tend to remove it temperamentally from the somewhat turbulent mediaeval stage. But, I repeat, very little of the blight of "culture" has made it at any point "self-conscious"; and extreme self-consciousness is allied to all modern effort after simplicity.

*The Cost of a Crown* was written on the invitation of the late Dr. Wilkinson, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, for the occasion of the Centenary of St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw; the music was composed by Mr. W. Sewell, afterwards sub-organist of Westminster Cathedral; and the whole was performed in the presence of the Archbishop of Westminster and many of the Bishops of England, in July, 1908, by the students of Ushaw.

Benson, in dealing with the life and martyrdom of John Bost, who was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Durham on July 24, 1594, was on his own ground. Helped by the researches of Father Goldie, who had published his results in the *Ushaw Magazine*, he has produced a really successful little play, despite (as he himself points out) certain incoherencies in plot, and the long periods which elapse between the acts.<sup>1</sup> Though Ushaw has unique associations with Durham, and therefore an especial claim upon this play, it is to be hoped that it will be long and often performed in our Catholic Colleges: this would be the best of thank-offerings to its author.

The preface is in the archaistic manner, and between the acts are lyrics in which Benson has caught the requisite style less well than in the "book" itself. Perhaps Mr.

<sup>1</sup> There is, however, no violent compression of time, as in the first scene, e.g., of *The Upper Room*.

Rudyard Kipling, in the songs of *Rewards and Fairies* and of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, has once and for all achieved perfection in the fusion of old and new, in style and the fancy alike.

John Bost was a Westmorland man, a Fellow of Queen's at Oxford, and had been a Protestant minister. Converted, he sought the priesthood, with its attendant probability of martyrdom, at Rheims. Act I shows the English College there, on August 2, 1580, and the arrival of Bost and his companions, just as Hanse, another ex-minister, wins an ominous crown at draughts. . . . The various characters of these English Catholics are boldly touched in ; their grave and courteous manner, and their gallant bearing, and sober yet passionate will to sacrifice their life for the preaching of their faith, is not to be improved on. Between Acts I and II the tableau of their ordination at Châlons-sur-Marne, on March 4, 1581, is perceived.

Act II passes in the Waterhouse near Durham, on the evening and morning of September 9 and 10, 1593. Bost's last night is spent there ; he is to say Mass on the morrow and will be betrayed. Eglesfield is the Judas, and a yet older friend, Bost's Oxford room-mate, the parson Ewbank. The Catholics in all simplicity play into their hands. There is much "irony" in this piece. The audience, certain of the end, suffer horribly as they see fate closing in around the Saint, who, having blessed Eglesfield, foresees, he too, his treachery. "O Thomas !" he cries to the servant ; "I am getting an old man. I am nearly fifty years old. . . . And I am still here." He longed for his crown : it was bound to come ; and "to be a priest is joy enough for any man. But to be a priest in England at this time—why, it near breaks my heart for joy." All

night long he prays, and in the wind is heard clearer and clearer the martyrs' hymn, *Deus tuorum Militum*. The second scene shows the gallant episode of his capture, and a tableau follows; John Bost is manacled to a post beside the rack, in the town, and the apostate Anthony Mayer takes notes on his behaviour. After the last Act, in the Assize Court at Durham, July 24, 1594, in which the martyr's trial is given almost *verbatim* from the original records, a final tableau displays the gallows, where John Bost stands, rope round neck, and lit up by the glow of the fire which shall be for his disembowelling. On his head is his cap, embroidered JESU, soon to be replaced by the crown he had won.

Hugh was pressed, too, to write a play on Richard Whiting, the last Abbot of Glastonbury, whose trial and execution, deliberately pre-arranged by Cromwell, are to be read of most easily in Cardinal Gasquet's *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*. Benson was very strongly attracted by the theme, but *The Cost of a Crown* being on the verge of publication, he felt he ought to allow its reception to guide him in a decision.

*The Maid of Orleans*, published in an illustrated edition in 1911, was, it may be thought, far less successful. It needs much more elaborate staging; the tableau representing the coronation is practically impossible in amateur performances. There would appear to be, moreover, a rather strained elevation of language and emotion throughout. Frankly, Benson was not at home in this period, and much more artificiality is apparent in this play. On the whole, Benson was trying in this to do, too quickly, and for motives of propaganda, the greater things of which he felt himself capable. Moreover, I cannot feel that he had that personal emotion towards Joan of Arc which he certainly

experienced in regard of the men who perished under Elizabeth. And his study of this girl shows no psychology.

*The Upper Room* appeared posthumously in November 1914; its introduction is reminiscent, by Cardinal Bourne; and its preface had to indicate, as was best possible, the author's intentions for his play. It was to be partly symbolical, the preface urges: not realistic. Hence the Supper-table will suggest (though not imitate) an altar, with its cloth and candles; Peter will carry keys, and Mary will put the Grail into the Arimathean's hands. Benson will emphasize the symbolic value even of persons when he can; he boldly accepts the translation, "*and HE was Night*," for the *et erat Nox* of the Vulgate, when Judas leaves the supper-room.<sup>1</sup>

The action passes altogether in the Upper Room, over the parapet of whose balcony torches, spear-heads, or the three crosses are observed to pass (as the third cross passes it is seen to reel and disappear, for its bearer falls). Beyond, at the back, an idealised hill of Calvary is seen, black against the starlight, or dawn, or the streaked sky of Good Friday, for the action extends from the departure to Gethsemane to the return from the entombment. It is divided into three scenes, of which the second is a kind of tableau; above the stripped table, where the candles are extinguished, Calvary is seen with vividly black crosses, very far away, and the *Reproaches* are sung. All the liturgical Passion music is introduced in some part or other of the play.

Naturally the whole piece is charged with a high emotion, and its literary aspect does not, and is not intended to, force itself upon one. The ungracious instinct of criticism suggests to a reader at any rate that very unequal

<sup>1</sup> "And Night he was who ran."

reminiscences of a mediaeval style, and some disconcerting echoes of Tennysonian rhythm and even diction (as, for instance, of the *Idylls of the King*), somewhat mar the sternly ecclesiastical manner which should, I fancy, be that of this play. That Mary should *here* be called "a very Queen of men for gallantry" seems wholly out of place, and in the earlier part of the first scene there are too many phrases of a sort of facile lusciousness: "The air turned faint with incense," a line written in connection with the Last Supper, jars terribly in a story for which the reticence of the Gospel record has for ever set an irreformable example. But it is for acting, not reading, that this play was swiftly written; and it seems the graver pity that on one occasion at least its performance was, at the last moment, vetoed by authority, on account of the presence on the stage of Mary, who speaks, after all, only a few lines of epilogue.

As the years went by, however, the desire to write a play which should be a London success grew till it amounted very nearly to a passion. He made acquaintances wherever he could with authors or actors, in order to learn stage technique; he would sit, in an armchair placed for him in the wings, and watch rehearsals; he would go, whenever this became for him legitimate, to see the plays themselves—in Scotland, for instance, and constantly in America. He displayed, however, great annoyance when a rumour was spread to the effect that Father Benson had declared that priests ought to go to theatres whenever they legitimately could.<sup>1</sup> He was delighted, on the other hand, with Mr. George Mozart's opinion that priests would find no better or more willing Catholics than among members of the theatrical profession, if only

<sup>1</sup> Curiously, I cannot find one example of his going, after he became a priest, to hear an opera, despite his keen love of music.

they would display the "sporting spirit" of Father Benson and go round and meet them at the stage door.

It was, however, owing to the close acquaintance he formed with Mr. George Grossmith that he first conceived the idea of dramatising his novels. It is true that the first novel he dramatised himself was *The Necromancers*, which he did at the suggestion of Mr. Bernard Merefield, on his voyage, in 1912, to America. On *The Sentimentalists*, however, he was long at work in a kind of loose collaboration with Mr. George Grossmith, and his letters to his mother are wild with excitement about its progress.

Of course, one of the main difficulties appeared to be the fact that "Chris Dell" had his existence in real life; but not only was the original Chris quite ready that the dramatisation of the book should be carried forward, but Mr. Grossmith himself pointed out how free from peril this might be.

If the book were dramatised, the character would henceforward be associated entirely with the personality of the actor. Any speech or action of "Chris Dell's" that might in cold print seem rather repellant, would only become comedy in the play. No actor would accept the part unless it were sympathetic in all its phases. The play should be a good one—and the first of all frankly Catholic plays. No one, I am absolutely certain, would ever try and discover who was the original model for its hero. I, myself, know a dozen men like him, and the man whose name I mentioned to you the other day (the most popular hazard) is flattered at being, as he himself also supposes, selected by you for immortalisation.

Very distinguished actors were approached, and the production seemed constantly to be imminent. However, for one reason or another it always fell through; the objections being chiefly, I gather, the rather silly character of Father Yolland (who could, of course, have been burlesqued

easily and amusingly enough, but Benson would not have tolerated the burlesque of a priest upon the stage); the lack of sympathetic female incident, and the "Roman" atmosphere. "Had Father Yolland," Mr. Grossmith wrote, "been the Reverend Mr., all might have been well."<sup>1</sup>

What really defeated his plans, however, lay, I fancy, deeper; and was connected with his general lack of acquaintance with the quite peculiar technique which is required in the writer of a successful play. It differs wholly from novel technique, and has for an important part the active catching up of all the characters into the complications and progress of the plot, which need not happen in a novel and does not, if you will observe, in most of Benson's.<sup>2</sup> The subsidiary characters there are little pictures. They appear and reappear, as though a blind were drawn up and down. But they do not, most of the time, cause anything to *happen*, nor does anything happen to them. It was Mr. E. W. Hornung, one of quite the greatest friends of Hugh's last years of life, who tried most successfully, perhaps, to convince him of this; and Hugh, whose admiration for Mr. Hornung's story, *Raffles*, was unlimited, could see, with his own eyes, how much and what manner of recasting it needed before it was capable of presentation as a play. How successful that play proved, all London knew during many months: but Hugh could hardly be persuaded that its success was due, in fit measure, to a laborious study, and accurate observa-

<sup>1</sup> The acquaintance of Father Benson with Mr. Grossmith remained close. It was Father Benson who was largely instrumental in obtaining for the latter his well-merited decoration *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, and Mr. Grossmith gave Father Benson the American organ now in Hare Street chapel, together with many other marks of affection.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this does not apply to "star" plays, where only one character matters. But these appear to me to be simply bad construction, save in exceptional cases.

tion of the rules. The plays, however, fragments of plays, left by him, prove that he had not, as yet at any rate, the patience and the particular gift required for writing what should "get across the foot-lights." Hence it is rather amusing to find him, at this very date, repeating Mr. Hornung's advice, almost word for word and with great severity, to a lady who was sending him the manuscripts of plays she had herself composed. His advice was admirable ; only there was no suggestion that the oracle had been coached ; and alas, here too it was advice he never could bring himself to take.

He had, however, nothing but encouragement for Catholic authors. Miss M. E. Young, whose plays and stories have long seemed to me to have an almost unshared quality of relentless realism positively slashed through by blades of mystical intuition, as well as suffused by the transfiguring light of human sympathy, was enthusiastically praised and eagerly supported by him. He could not tolerate the idea that her talents should not be used in the service of the Christian ideal.

Miss Young writes to me :

Speaking of a wise and holy nun, who had warned me off the play-idea, from reverence, he didn't agree with that. What he said was to the effect that nuns, splendid in spiritual things, didn't know—— I think he meant, the roughness of attack needed in assaulting the World, massively entrenched.

His enjoyment of the play-man's attitude, his picture of the Church as non-Catholics think she is, his "offensive tactics"—all goes with the vigour, directness, simpleness, crudeness, which I saw in his work. The unmistakable thing in the interview was Monsignor Benson's humility. He simply didn't think anything of himself.

He much wished, in fact, to see an "All-Catholic" theatre established in London, where a Catholic company should



produce Catholic drama. The possibility of this was often discussed with Miss Ethel St. Barbe, the secretary of the Catholic Stage Guild, an admirable institution founded not long ago with the general object of helping Catholic artists on tour and in general of promoting Catholic interests connected with the stage.<sup>1</sup> He was on its executive committee ; spoke at its first public meeting on November 27, 1911, at Farm Street, and took the chair for it at the Catholic Congress, held at Norwich in 1912. He spoke again on July 7, 1914, at the Guild's annual meeting in the Vaudeville Theatre, and was constantly writing to the Press on behalf of it, and indeed, soon after the war broke out in 1914, he wrote (I am told) to the *Daily Mail*, urging people to attend theatres as usual.

This attitude towards the stage has met with many critics whose view Monsignor Benson could understand without sharing it. He certainly saw quite clearly that to assume that the stage was a bad institution was the quickest way of making it so ; and he knew that the best way of making a thing good is often to ask it to do something that is good. The enormous power of the stage no one fails to recognise : Benson regretted that at times it was misused ; he thought it cowardly to disregard it ; wanton, to try to suppress it ; and, that to make fit use of it brought him, in addition to the merit for good work done, an enthralling pleasure, appeared to him no reason why he should refrain from this department of apostolate, or from baptizing this form, too, of art.

"It was the music, first and last," Monsignor Benson wrote in his *Confessions*, which attracted him during the

<sup>1</sup> It was the Guild which produced the Nativity play in 1914. Monsignor Benson came to all the rehearsals, "held the book" at the performances, and helped to build the Crib.

barren year of his cramming, to St. Paul's : "and it was through that opening that I first began to catch glimpses of the spiritual world."

And later, when a priest at Cambridge, he wrote to Mr. Rolfe :

Do tell me where you stand about music. . . . To me it is the greatest reservoir of emotion, from which flow out streams of salvation. I wish to have a string quartet and a vocal quartet to go before me all day, play me to sleep, and sing me awake in the morning. Cambridge, fortunately, is quite first-rate in that—they sing Palestrina thrice a term in King's Chapel : and I run there on those occasions on both feet.

The power of music seems to have assailed him brusquely, but at all times, unless I am mistaken, it was allied, in his case, with other sense-impressions. The supreme example of this is his manner of appreciating *Parsifal*, which, as we have seen, lodged in his imagination chiefly as a pageant, though as pure music to the end it remained what he called "above him."

Be that as it may, there was no time when he did not like "fooling about," as he called it, especially with the organ. At Lambeth he and another used to play the organ as best they could, together. At St. Paul's and at King's, and again Ely, he used to sit for hours in the loft, watching the organist's methods ; or again, in King's College ante-chapel, intoxicated with the hour and the place, and the anthem.<sup>1</sup> He already liked more than the "square shouting hymns" in which all the congregation joined, and, as I said, his taste must have been a good deal developed by Mr. F. Marshall during his years at Kemsing. But it was remain-

<sup>1</sup> The music at King's College, and its setting, is described with a sort of passionate sympathy in the unexpected pages of the *Babe B.A.*, by Mr. E. F. Benson.

ing, from all the hints I can collect, obstinately ecclesiastical. At Mirfield, it is only to his affection for carols that I can find allusion made. His Nativity play is musical throughout with exquisite Noël's. "The Lord at first had Adam made": "A Virgin unspotted": "When Christ was born of Mary free" were especial favourites; and even dearer to him was the Coventry carol "Lullay, thou little tiny child," and the Besançon carol, with its interwoven Latin, "Come let us all sweet carols sing."<sup>1</sup> "And down, like light cutting through dusky air," he writes of the carols at St. Paul's in *Loneliness*, "came . . . the sound of those antique, bitter-sweet airs, solemn as a church and yet gay as a country fair; that strange wedding, accomplished in carols as in nothing else, of the deepest mysteries of supernature with the lightest emotions of humanity." Mr. Clarence Mills, now deputy organist at the Cambridge rectory, assures me that Father Benson liked Beethoven's symphonies and disliked Mendelssohn, though Monsignor Scott thinks the contempt he expressed for the latter was merely the following of a fashion. He loved Anglican hymn tunes and displayed in this point a rather unchastened predilection for the sentimental and the sweet. Association, however, had much to do with this; for he had a savage hatred for most of the modern tunes to which, for instance, the Loretto Litany is so often languishingly or uproariously set. It will be remembered how devotedly, at Rome, he had pursued Palestrina and good plain chant; and in the *Papers of a Pariah* there are paragraphs upon music which seem to me to display greater sensitiveness than anything, almost, that he wrote later on. The *Amen* of the funeral *Libera* recalls to him the panegyric in *La Cathédrale*:

<sup>1</sup> His taste was robust: he described Barnby's music to "When I view the Mother holding in her arms the heavenly Boy," as "swoony."

“Timid and distant, plaintive and sweet, this *Amen* said, ‘We have done what we could, but . . . but. . . .’” “I defy (a man),” Benson proceeds himself, “to be eloquent in the bleak gospel of Cheerfulness for at least ten minutes after the last *Amen* has ceased.” But it is in the chapter upon Holy Week that Benson’s mystic interpretation of music in terms of spirit indeed, but also of colour, scent, and light, reaches its boldest.

One at a lectern chanted out a comment in a kind of wailing melody that rose and fell, as a dying man who has been long silent might croon out a tune, very slowly, note by note, up and down ; and then, as if the tension would break our hearts altogether, there came a gush of the lamentable harmony, that was like the sudden smell of autumn and the ruddy gleam of sunset, penetrating a silent death-chamber.

From his description of the Holy Saturday *Exultet* I have already quoted. Dare we not say that to no one, not Huysmans nor any other, has the Liturgical chant spoken out, more fully, all its secrets ? It contains in itself, for Benson, all the meanings too and all the prophecies of the senses that are not hearing ; and similarly, at a great moment, Benson cannot otherwise describe the huge impression created by the Liturgy as a whole, than in terms of music.

Ah ! it is not possible to say how . . . real it was to me. I can only tell myself again that it was like a chord of music, struck without a note, sounding without vibration, welling out in the stillness as of an orchestra of strings and mellow horns held long to one great harmony that reconciled good and evil, pain and joy, life and death, God and nature.

But it would be false to suppose that here, if nowhere else, the whimsical element in his character, and his tendency to caricature, would remain in abeyance. Mr.

Reynolds writes that, at Cambridge, Father Benson used at times to visit him at his rooms, and then, of course, music was rarely lacking. Benson himself performed :

He played with an extraordinarily precise touch, but with such a droll action of the hands—they looked like choppers—that I always exclaimed with laughter directly he touched the piano. I remember X told me that Benson was very pleased because I had said that his (Benson's) playing was superior to nearly all amateurs I had ever heard, in one respect, namely, that he always struck all the notes of a chord *absolutely* simultaneously. Once we met in the London house of a mutual friend. I began playing hymns on the piano and my friend added ornamental tops—pretty but rather ordinary. Then Benson rushed to the piano to show the sort of top he liked, and proceeded to chop out with amazing deftness a “top” which nobody else could possibly have thought of except himself—it was quick with trills and turns executed very fiercely and suddenly. He had naturally good taste in music, though I fancy very little knowledge of it.

To the end he retained an extraordinary delight in musical caricature. One of his friends was able to reduce that very liturgical chant Benson so loved, to parody. Waltz tunes based on the *He Missa Est* ; chants, Anglican perhaps, by preference, in rag-time ; litanies, scarcely needing parody, reduced to sentimental love-songs, gave him a frank and hilarious delight, and he asked for them again and again. Say what you please, his general taste could be sufficiently Aristophanic or, if you will, Rabelaisian, to leave those who knew only his more mystical aspect, marvelling.

Encouraged by the *Pariah*, and by certain letters in the *Tablet* upon “mutilated Masses,” a religious of a famous convent, who had herself been a highly-trained musician, wrote to him upon the “need of a clearer understanding of and true appreciation of Plain Chant by priests, laity, and musicians—especially musicians.” It was the proper

harmonisation of Plain Chant on which she most insisted. "Eliminate," she said, "from the accompaniment all discords of the supertonic, tonic, and dominant as well as all chromatic chords, and only use chords corresponding to the *mode*." She appealed more directly to Monsignor Benson's preferences by suggesting a series of tableaux representing the subjects of the Masses, accompanied by trained voices and proper harmonies. Thus in the Mass of the Holy Innocents the Angels' *Alleluia* was to form an unearthly contrast with the earthlier lamentation of the Mothers, audible in the *Communion*. Other masses were, with much spiritual insight, examined in view of this mingling of dramatic spectacle and music, and in the Mass of the Feast of the Sacred Heart she perceived a whole "exposition of the mystical life."

Father Benson answered :

January 19.

MY DEAR SISTER,—Your letter has interested me enormously. And I am convinced that you are on the right lines. I remember a sentence in one of Huysmans' books—an artist anyhow! "Surely," said Durtal, with his eyes full of tears, "surely Plainsong is inspired by the Holy Ghost." But what I fear in your scheme is that it would require an audience of artists! I think it would be ideal. But I believe that nine out of ten of the average audience would make nothing of it. It is necessary to remember that you yourself, living in the cloister, and an interior life, and *also* being a musician, are simply bound to see deeper than people living in the world.

He makes a number of suggestions, of convents, schools, or interested persons; but no results came of this. He was hopeful that Mr. Frank Liebich, of whom I speak in a moment, might be able to do something, perhaps at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Roehampton, where Mrs. Liebich and himself had, with extraordinary

skill, assisted in the production of some *Parsifal* tableaux and recitations, admirably combined with some of Wagner's music.

Undoubtedly Monsignor Benson got more direct help in musical understanding from Mr. Frank Liebich than from anybody else. Mr. Liebich is a distinguished pianist of Bohemian and Polish origin, well known for his admirable execution of the more modern schools of French and Hungarian music; while of the subtle work of his wife, Mrs. L. Shirley Liebich, perhaps her book upon Claude Debussy is best known. Mr. Liebich first made Monsignor Benson's acquaintance in January 1912, and was invited to stay at Hare Street from the 9th to the 13th. The delight Monsignor Benson was to draw from Mr. Liebich's company was equalled most certainly by the quiet happiness which, Mr. Liebich tells me, came to him, on his side, from his sojourn in what he could compare only with Richard Raynal's hermitage for charm and peace. The acquaintance ripened into friendship, independently at first of music; though after a time the friends used to go round to a neighbouring cottage after tea, for music, and, when in London, Monsignor Benson would often lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Liebich, and there would always, of course, be music.

All, Mr. Liebich thinks, that Benson needed, was opportunity for *more* music. He appreciated, by a wonderfully right instinct, what was "good, sincere, and really *felt*;" though, "in our opinion," Mrs. Liebich tells me, "Wagner loomed rather too large in his horizon! But then that was the fault of most people in England."

I believe it, too, to have been because of the intimate welding together, in Wagner's operas, of music with dramatic plot, and tremendous spiritual forces. Benson

found himself admitted by him into a colossal world, where nothing of emotion and aspiration—save possibly quite the deepest and purest and highest—was to be sought in vain. In fact, all that is most human, and most Titanic, most intimate and most transcendent, was there to toss his own soul from this part to that of a universe tenanted by men, by gods, and by portentous energies deeper, somehow, the revolutionary creed of Wagner told you, than any man or god. All of this his mind was peculiarly attuned to appreciate, and he had long ago loved the etiolated edition of it which Maeterlinck had been able to offer him; and it has its almost adequate literary version in the sombre and tumultuous ideals of Mr. Algernon Blackwood's *Centaur*.

His worship of Wagner, with its attendant limitations, is reflected in his last novel, *Loneliness*. It will be later that I shall try to evaluate the chief doctrine of that book; here I speak only of its operatic pages.

Marion Tenterden springs suddenly into fame as a soprano, destined to sing in Wagnerian opera.<sup>1</sup> Elsa in *Lohengrin*, and Isolde are to be her two great parts. A maiden of character, she refuses to be conventional. She will be a black-haired Elsa. "But," they argue, "Elsa *must* be flaxen." "Stuff and nonsense! A flaxen girl wouldn't have broken her promise. . . ." She would have nothing on her head: Madame wanted the regulation fillet. . . . "Stuff and nonsense," cries Marion to that too. "But they'll have a fit at Covent Garden. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Monsignor Benson frankly said that he knew nothing of the training or special qualities of prima donnas; he got up all he could in three hours or so from a musical student of distinction. Nor shall I for my part ask whether a girl of Marion's physique could have taken *Isolde* equally well with *Elsa*; or whether anyone with her temperament, or rather lack of it, could have sung successfully as either.



"I don't care." And her dress . . . ? White, with daringly blue stockings. For Elsa had the makings, Marion maintained, of "a very small little prig." . . . "Do you think they'll see the point ? . . . But it doesn't matter if they don't." And with the stockings must go the turquoises and moonstones ; "they're just dead in tone." (They had the colour-value of the knights' mantles in *Parsifal* translated into blue.) "But of course these donkeys of a B.P. wouldn't see it anyhow." How does this Marion speak, word for word, with Monsignor Benson's tongue ! and observe how for him (and so Wagner would have wished it) the music was not *detachable*—not a thing in itself, but organically interknit with the whole human pageant of the opera.

Marion's psychology during the first night of *Lohengrin* is vividly given ; but it is the actress whom Benson is here dissecting, not music which he is explaining. What makes one first of all suspect that Hugh Benson did not really get all that the Wagnerian music had to give—and missed, indeed, part of its most terribly precious gifts—is a little scene where Marion is explaining to old Sir Robert Mainwaring that she thinks Italian opera *has* its place, but not a high one—the Italians are narrow, "denominational" ; while German opera was as "wide as life," life not being "made up of melodies, according to rule ; it's made up of broad effects." Melody exists in Wagner, she, perhaps unnecessarily, grants ; but one melody slides off into and mixes with the others, as moonlight will into the dawn. The ethical point of the discussion, in its place in the book, is of course the unsatisfactory narrowness of Catholicism ; but there is throughout the whole of it the impression that the girl's—and the author's—emotional attitude towards *Lohengrin* is very much that in which they stand towards *Tristan*. It is not so much that by representing Isolde as drinking

"the poison cup" in the third act, whereas the cup incident occurs in the middle of the first, that he reveals himself as having inadequately visualised the "Liebestod" scene of *Tristan*, on which he dwells so much; nor yet by the orthodox arguments he quotes to show that Isolde is a more mature and more complex personality than Elsa, that he can prove himself to be understanding Isolde from within. Frankly, his shortcoming seems to me to reveal itself best in the emotional value of the pages in which he describes her final song and death, though this, of course, each reader must subjectively appraise for himself. I cannot but say, then, for my part that these pages appear to me perfunctory. The analysis and enthusiastic description of the "Liebestod," with their few references to the musical instruments severally involved and its generalisations, appear to me so devoid of interior impulse that they might have been "lifted" straight from some concert programme annotated, in which you are told what you are to feel as you listen, and in the proper order, and why. Nor, if I have been right elsewhere in judging Benson (as in the section on the "Sentimentalists"), should this appear surprising. Much of *Tristan* is sick utterly, and full of the odour of corruption and of death. It is not to be wondered at that Benson, capable of appreciating passion but scarcely the yearning yet defiant passion of *Tristan*, should have failed to convey in his description the communication of any spiritual conviction.<sup>1</sup>

"Monsignor," writes Mrs. Shirley Liebich, "loved Bach's music. It rested and refreshed him. He would sit absorbed. Chopin was not so much to his liking, though he felt the solace, pathos, and beauty of his music. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Other small errors.—Tetramund: Meistersingers: prove no more than that the book failed of adequate revision.

But Mr. Liebich's chief gift, if I may say so, is to convey to the unaccustomed English ear the meaning of the modern French composers, Debussy, Ravel, and their followers, and the unpublished works of Hungarian writers. Monsignor Benson was fortunate in being introduced to these men by guides so accomplished in theory and practice alike as are Mr. and Mrs. Liebich. They showed him photographs of the Louvre caryatides which had inspired Debussy's first prelude, *Les Dansesuses de Delphes*. Benson felt at least something of the classic calm and repose in that strange music. Mr. Liebich, by way of Poe's poem, *The City in the Sea*, and the story of the *Cité d'Ys*, led him to appreciate *La Cathédrale Engloutie* and to visualise the submerged walls and towers and vaults, booming still and echoing with—with waves and tides? or bells and chants and organs . . . ? Debussy will not tell us, of course : but Benson loved to see one vision forming itself across another and two planes of thought commingling, transfusing, disintegrating once more, the supernatural pulsing and throbbing in and through the natural. But I much fear he tended to materialise the music and to translate it too freely into visual terms. He liked what could give him a complete picture : *Le Vent sur la Plaine*, *Les Pas dans la Neige*.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is only at the end of his Preludes that Debussy consents to write their title, lest the visualisation should interfere with the hearer's enjoyment of sheer *music*. Benson liked, too, to hear about the old ecclesiastical, and Greek, Syrian, Indian and Chinese modes, and their evolution, and their disuse about the time of Bach, or their

<sup>1</sup> It was Madame Debussy, to whom her husband had played this latter prelude, then still unnamed, who declared, to his delight, that she heard in it, Footsteps in the snow. That had been his intention. Quaintly, Benson got confused about this and told many people that it was Mrs. Liebich who, at her husband's playing, named the piece aright, by accurate intuition.

elbowing out, as it were, by the diatonic major and minor scale. The Chinese whole-tone scale and many Eastern scales are recovering their position, and all this Mr. Liebich illustrated generously for him.

Am I wrong in supposing that if, as Mr. Liebich emphatically asserts, Benson was in sympathy with what is known as ultra-modern music, it was on the impressionist side of himself only? To quite a different element in his soul—the scholastically logical—will the severe and mathematical method of Bach have appealed: to the constructive, objective, and imaginative, Wagner offered his tremendous drama, only not quite satisfying because he was felt as magical rather than religious, theosophic at any rate rather than Christian, revolutionary to the brink of anarchy. But modern music gave him just a series of impressions: detached sensations like, for example, the splendid series of juxtaposed chords which you find in Debussy's *Terrasses des Audiences du Clair de Lune*. But in these gentle, or fierce, explosions of human sensibility are to be found (to my feeling) neither faith, nor hope, nor charity; and beautiful as all this music is, not in it could he have found any ultimate spiritual contentment.

At first he determined to have, at Hare Street, a pianola, in order to hear, in some way at least, so much that he wanted to hear. Mr. Liebich inspected a number for him. Then he determined to wait till his return from America (1913), and till the paved garden walk should be completed and paid for. But his passion grew; he was eager to be given hints and short cuts, by Mr. Liebich, towards an improved technique; he resolved on buying a piano. "P.S.," he adds, in a quite recent letter, "I definitely want a Grand,—not a Pianola. I am determined to learn!!!" On June 26, 1914, Mr. Liebich chose a Bechstein for him;

it was sent to Hare Street a day or two afterwards ; its arrival was announced ; Benson found it gave him "never-ending joy." Eagerly he invited Mr. Liebich down to play on it. Engagements clashed : as late as October 9, a postcard came trying for a late appointment. Mr. Liebich never came to Hare Street again until Hugh's funeral, and Mr. Reeman could but hand on to him his dead master's repeated assurance that he was not disappointed at his failure so far only because he was determined to bring Mr. Liebich down as soon as possible from London, and little else but music was to occupy them.

It will be remembered that Hugh Benson used to punctuate the writing of *By What Authority* by excursions into a neighbouring room where there was a piano, and by striking there a few detached chords. Thus he administered to himself the necessary nervous shocks which should restore him in exhaustion. It was like sheer joy in splendid colour : no tune was necessary ; no pattern need be necessary : nor was melody, nor even form : just a sudden glory, for ear or eye. It is in *The Coward* that he best shows how he means music to be taken as a spiritual drug, or, again, stimulant. It is Father Maple's piano-playing which, floating in through the parish church window to where Lady Beatrice sits among hatchments, brasses, tombs, and modern glass, lulls to sleep the Anglican instincts fostered by the environment, and draws her across the road into the Catholic presbytery.

Very delicately and sweetly the music came in here—some grave and humorous gavotte by a German master, scholarly, melancholy, academic, and yet with soft laughter in it too. Little positive phrases asserted themselves solemnly, then turned head over heels, chuckled, and vanished. . . . She listened, charmed in spite of herself.

Does not that show a true and sensitive appreciation of a kind of music not easily "understood of the people" ?

But not until the priest's visit to Medhurst, and his playing after dinner in the great hall, is the full spell of music allowed to reveal itself, in its breaking up of the ice-crust which had formed itself round the soul of the lad whom his family held contemptible, as a Coward. The priest, deliberately, first wooed that soul, through sentiment ; and then mastered it with strength. Obediently Val followed the priest out, that night, and introduced himself, and visited him later, and learnt from him many secrets of life. A communication had been established, by means of music, between the interior spirit of each of these two men.

That any true musical inspiration flows straight from a man's sub-consciousness, and goes directly to its hearer's, if he but leave himself accessible, is of course his belief.

"Music," he writes,<sup>1</sup> "and its relation to man's inner nature, has not yet been adequately considered. All other arts are imitative or descriptive : music is creative. Painting imitates colours : not so music, a bird's song, or thunder. Music, it may well be, rises from a spring within man himself, and if imitative at all is imitative of something beyond the world of sense." He concludes with the paradox that it is no compliment to a composer to tell him that his overture is like thunder, but it is a great compliment to the thunder to say that it is like an organ-pipe ; recalling thus the anecdote of the Turner-worshipper who, to the criticism that no sunsets were *like* Turner's, retorted : "No, but don't you wish they were ?" and in general of the dictum that Art is the correction of Nature. Clearly, both for Benson and for the epigrammatist, the ambiguity lies in the word *nature*. Both music and the natural phenomenon, Plato

<sup>1</sup> *Dublin Review*, July 1907, p. 84, note.

would have said, imitate or express, each after its kind, the true Nature, invisible, typical, and energetic behind all things of sight and sound alike.

And all this creed reaches by far its most mystical expression in that book of concentrated Mysticism, *None Other Gods*. Frank Guiseley was lying in the barn at midnight, and near him were the gross and loathly Major, and Gertie, vulgar and timid, the soul Frank had to save. Into this hateful atmosphere came the music.

At first it was a single voice that made itself heard—a tenor of extraordinary clarity. The air was unknown to him, but it had the character of antiquity; there was a certain pleasant melancholy about it; it contained little trills and grace-notes, such as—before harmony developed in the modern sense—probably supplied the absence of chords. There was no wind on which the sound could rise or fall, and it grew from a thread out of the distance into clear singing not a quarter of a mile away. . . .

The Major presently grunted over his pipe some expression of surprise; but Frank could say nothing. He was almost holding his breath, so great was his pleasure.

The air, almost regretfully, ran downhill like a brook approaching an inevitable full close; and then, as the last note was reached, a chord of voices broke in with some kind of chorus.

The voices were a quartette of men, and rang together like struck notes, not loud or harsh, but, on the contrary, with a restrained softness that must, I suppose, have been the result of very careful training. It was the same air that they were repeating, but the grace-notes were absent, and the four voices, in chord after chord, supplied their place by harmony. It was impossible to tell what was the subject of the song or even whether it were secular or sacred, for it was of that period—at least, so I conjecture—when the two worlds were one, and when men courted their love and adored their God after the same fashion. Only there ran through all, that air of sweet and austere melancholy, as if earthly music could do no more than hint at what the heart wished to express. . . .

All this part is done with perfect skill and therefore with perfect reticence. There are no explanations. Village choirs ? Ghosts ? Angels ? You are not told what the singers were, nor why, in their music, came so strongly to Frank Guiseley the impression of two worlds—not, the music symbolising, suggesting, standing for the spiritual, but containing it, *it* in another way : the supernatural, he had long ago said to his brother, opened directly out of the natural ; here, better still, each is in the other, because God is in all, Who in Himself contains all real and possible existence. It was a “stream of salvation” for him, and the onrush of the river made glad that City of God, which was his soul.

The final mode of vital expression which was congenial to this artist was ritual. Benson had, to a quite extraordinary degree, what is to be called the liturgical sense. By this I do not mean that he was the victim of a feverish ritualism, which can be seen portrayed in all its meanness in the skilful chapter of *Sinister Street I* which is entitled “Incense.” The singular itch to copy Roman ritual just because it is Roman and ritual, and, the more exotic, the more naughtily delightful, was never for a moment Benson’s. Nor certainly do I mean that uncanny knowledge of what to do next in a ceremony which appears to be as instinctive in certain favoured persons as to dance gracefully is in others. I mean, that just as any vivid perception of life and reality drove him at once to its expression, by a chord clashed upon a musical instrument, by a flaunted piece of colour, in a scene hurled down upon paper by a headlong pen, so would he find that colour, music, formula, gesture, movement could be combined to form a medium for that expression, and had indeed been so combined by the historic Church of Rome.



I wish to make it clear, in view of a popular misconception, that he did not for a moment suppose that the actual ceremonies of the Roman Church, or indeed any particular ceremonies, were ordained by Christ.<sup>1</sup> Christ, he conceived, stood outside the arts, and left it to universal human nature to clothe in humanly suitable raiment the divine things He bequeathed to the world. More exactly, His Church, which is in a mystical way Himself, and is in the most real sense animated by His Spirit, clothes in their *intrinsically* most suitable dress, Benson held, the eternal sacraments of His Power. Two general considerations follow directly from this. First, that there is no sort of need for one, who does not believe in the spiritual core of ceremonies, to find anything impressive, beautiful, or significant in their outward form. It is a vulgar mistake to suppose that a High Mass appears solemn or portentous to one who does not believe in, or at least sympathise with, its doctrine of Real Presence and of Sacrifice. It appears (and indeed is) confused, without climax, fidgety ; even, it may seem, grotesque. Benson has achieved, in his *Papers of a Pariah*, a very excellent external picture of Low Mass and of Benediction as watched by the eyes and, at first, *not* understood by the heart. Next, a perfectly believing Catholic may lack the liturgical sense just as he may have no ear for music or be colour-blind. The Liturgy may be, for him, no sort of desirable mode of expressing his quite real belief and worship. Indeed the liturgical impetus, so to call it, would now appear to have flagged, and as men's religion does not drive them to create any more Gothic cathedrals, so neither can they write, it seems, a collect. There has scarcely been a genuine hymn written since the fourteenth century ; and a terrible tendency has declared

<sup>1</sup> I am not, of course, speaking of sacraments.

itself to use that as an *attraction* which once was a *homage*. Frankly, altar candles are not there to give light : flowers are not meant to make the Church look pretty, nor incense to make it smell sweet, just as mitres are not for the keeping bishops' heads warm, nor copes for a protection against rain. The elements which make up ritual, having risen above the utilitarian, must never be allowed to collapse into mere æstheticism.

In Benson, then, the liturgical spirit reigned triumphant. Instinctively he felt that the way in which he wanted to express his religious emotion, lit up in his soul by contact with the Divine, was the way in which the Church actually did so. He never could see that because you wanted to do a thing, or liked doing it, it somehow ceased to be meritorious or ethically right. He was not *self-indulgent*, because he delighted in behaving as the Church told him to behave. It is true, he delighted to obey. Indeed, he says again and again that nothing can be more vulgar than originality in the sanctuary. To start with, there is no need for it. The Church offers her children many different occasions of approaching the Royal Presence, each with its appropriate etiquette. At Court there is always etiquette, though it differs with its occasions. Here you can choose your time for an audience. In the nursery, indeed, there is very little ceremony ; yet, even there, well-brought-up children rise when their parents enter. Even in the most secret oratory some external reverence will spontaneously be offered by the worshipper to the God who meets him.

In every part of the Liturgy Benson spontaneously saw what the Church wanted him, or allowed him, to see. The pall which covers the empty catafalque at an All Souls' Day requiem is the heavy door of death black upon all men, but also the ample love of the all-embracing Church which

mothers them. The cardinal's red is the royal colour of princes of the blood. The whole High Mass he simply cannot see save as a ritual dance. Was it not Cardinal Wiseman who declared that he loved taking part in a great Church ceremony as others might delight in a State ball? "If I," says Mr. Belloc, "had power for some thirty years, I would see to it that people should be allowed to follow their inbred instincts in these matters, and should hunt, drink, sing, dance, sail, and dig; and those that would not should be compelled by force. Now, in the morning Mass you do all that the race needs to do and has done for all these ages where religion was concerned; there you have the sacred and separate enclosure, the altar, the priest in his vestments, the set ritual, the ancient and hierarchic tongue, and all that your nature cries out for in the matter of worship." I should call all this very Bensonian, were it not that the *Path to Rome* appeared well before the *Papers of a Pariah*.

Here, then, as everywhere, Benson sees the Catholic Church to be inclusive. The Anglican repudiates the historic, hieratic language, and his prayers are read at least as much to the congregation as to God. The Baptist gets rid of scent and colour; the Quaker of sound.

But the Catholic who aspires to count all men as his brethren employs every vehicle that his romantic brain can suggest; he batters the Kingdom of Heaven by five portals at once; he is not ashamed to take his place with the worshippers of Isis and Cybele, with King David, and with the naked Fijean, and to dance with all his might before the Lord. I must confess that I shall look with dismay upon my clergyman next Sunday. It is not that he does not dance, but that he has nothing to dance about, and has not learnt the steps.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Papers of a Pariah*, p. 125.

“He has not learnt the steps. . . .” Yes ; for as the dogmas of the Church are not of human invention, nor of merely human expression, but were formulated in the *best* way (as far as may be) for human understanding, so neither is religious truth, that is, the divine life, to be expressed just *anyhow* through ritual. All art has its rules ; and even if at first one may not want to express one’s religion thus and thus, with good will and the faith that is ready to listen and learn, one soon may grow to see that “thus and thus” is, after all, the method of expression to be preferred. The liturgical spirit, if it be not wholly absent, can be developed and formed by the assiduity of its possessor in the practice of the best examples. Hugh Benson wrote to his brother, in the course of a long discussion started by the *Pariah*, that—

Liturgy, to my mind, is nothing more than a very fine and splendid art, conveying things to people who possess the liturgical faculty, in an extraordinarily dramatic and vivid way. I further believe that this is an art which has been gradually brought nearer and nearer perfection by being tested and developed through nineteen centuries by every kind of mind and nationality. The way in which it does, indisputably, appeal to such very different kinds of people, and unites them, does, quite apart from other things, give it a place with music and painting.

In this way, extending somewhat the vision (as artists, by rapid refocusing of their gaze, are able to do) all life can become, for a Hugh Benson, something of a great ceremony, no fortuitous or arbitrary symbol, but a series of duly ordained actions, sacramental even, and containing, or causing, what they represent. Mr. Algernon Blackwood, in his *Incredible Adventures*—a book whose very title would have been a delight to Hugh—has a story called *The Sacrifice*, in which men make, in company, the ascent

(if I remember right) of a peak, La Tour du Néant.<sup>1</sup> Gradually it was realised by them how the ascent "pertained to some significant ceremony"; the significance approached to being a revelation: power must result from its sincere accomplishment. Then came the "big strange knowledge that all of life is a ceremony on a giant scale, and that by performing the movements accurately" there may come yet more knowledge; "knowledge arises from action: to do the thing invites the teaching and explains it." I could wish no more perfect expression of how ritual is the result, but also the stimulant of worship; directs and provokes it; expresses, and inspires it. The secret is, that nothing in this world is purely static. What truly *represents*, is operative: "a group of men," Mr. Blackwood proceeds, "a family, an entire nation, engaged in those daily movements which are the working out of their destiny, perform a ceremony which is in direct relation somewhere to the pattern of greater happenings which are the teachings of the Gods."

For him, then, who has first learnt how to love, beyond all other actions conceivable, the saying of his Mass, it may not be long before this earth's whole globe becomes an Altar with inextinguishable lights, and every act of will, a Consecration.

If then I would argue that Hugh Benson was an artist, it will not be because he wrote successfully, carved daringly, painted boldly, showed an astonishing sense of true music, and loved the stage; but because he not only saw life, but put himself in vital contact with it, and forthwith, having conceived of it, re-expressed it in

<sup>1</sup> Here are indeed St. John of the Cross and Mount Carmel in an unlooked-for guise!

many of the myriad ways in which that inexhaustible mystery is capable of expression. To all His creation, God calls : in all its effort, then, is a purpose and a response : in all Hugh's own work, therefore, as in his soul, is visible the effort to obey, direct, and accelerate that universal answer to the divine vocation. Not man is the source of life ; but man can draw deep draughts from it : and it is this springing vitality, divine in origin and in purpose, which sweeps men and women along with Hugh Benson as he moves. Sometimes, it flags : he observes ; stands aloof ; records. Then he is less of an artist. Sometimes he has no time to wait for trifles : provided he gets to the goal, he shoulders his way roughly through the undergrowth. Then, again, he is less of a completed artist. "Tout le reste n'est que littérature." But for the complete artist there is no "remainder." He catches it *all* up, and even when he eliminates, does not disregard. God is reverent of His own creation : man must never be contemptuous. Pain, I hinted, was herein Hugh's best teacher. In a further chapter I try to study that grave Initiation which, through suffering, made him wise.



*Photo G. Jerrard*

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

IN OCTOBER 1912: AGED 40





## CHAPTER V

### “INITIATION”

*Coeptit pavere, et taedere, et moestus esse.*

MARK xiv. 33 ; MATT. xxvi. 37.

This is my chiefest torment, that behind  
This brave and subtle spirit, this swift brain,  
There sits and shivers in his cell of pain  
A groping atom, melancholy, blind,  
Which is myself, though when spring suns are kind  
And live leaves riot in the genial rain  
I cheat him dreaming ; slip my guarded chain,  
Free as a skiff before the dancing wind.

Then he awakes, and, vexed that I am glad,  
Pricks his thin claw within some delicate nerve,  
Sets his dull heel upon the thrilling cord,  
And all at once I falter, start, and swerve  
From my true course, and fall, unmanned and sad,  
Into gross darkness, tangible, abhorred.<sup>1</sup>

IN the history of His Catholic Church, Christ's life is lived over again in detail ; the narrative of each one of His saints retraces its main outline ; within the soul of every individual who strives in his measure to develop his Master's life within himself, the hours of the Passion precede the dawn of Easter. Therefore in Hugh Benson's experience fear and loneliness and pain could not, for all its success and popularity and variegated triumphing, be absent. Striving always to work inwards, I will write first

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Benson loved, and quoted thus, the tragic sonnet, “Self,” composed by his brother, Mr. A. C. Benson. In this and the following chapter I have been forced to isolate and as it were codify states of mind which of course grew up naturally, interacted, corrected and modified one another. Such isolation and “fixing” of moods appears to me to be justifiable provided I am not taken to imply that in the actual living man the processes were anything like so simple.

of what pain meant to him in his life, then of fear, and then of loneliness. In each case, the evidence of his books and letters is sufficient ; but there is a more intimate evidence still, and I trust never to speak otherwise than truthfully.

By Pain I mean physical pain, and although this is but the shadow of mental suffering, and indeed may be considered negligible when the soul is happy, or actually may be needed in the strange complexity of human life to rectify the too poignant pang of high spiritual joy, sheer physical pain occupied a permanent place in Hugh Benson's imagination as terrible, and there are few of his books into which it does not enter as a necessary element.

His nervous system was, as I said in the first chapter, from the beginning over-responsive to outside stimulus, and on the rapidly registered sensations his brain, quick to form connections, played with intolerable logic. Thus the notion of pain was naturally associated for him, while still a child, with that of knives and cutting ; he therefore said that he felt it hurt him to have his hair cut, and asked if he might first have chloroform. Though this was meant, I need not say, as a joke, yet there was something in Hugh which made him think of that *sort* of joke, and is significant. All his life through visits to the dentist completely unmanned him.

"I am shaky and stupid," he wrote in 1905, "after one hour in the dentist's chair. Oh, why do such people exist ? I HATE PAIN. It is also Monday, and I preached for thirty-five minutes last night, ate no meat all day, and fasted till 12.45. And for me that sort of thing means MISERY."

At first, however, except for the woes of influenza and a certain amount of neuralgia, at times acute, and, considerably later, a sharp experience of torturing neuritis, his direct

experience of physical pain was slight. In his earlier books there is little description of it ; not until the *Queen's Tragedy* does he study pain from within the sufferer's consciousness. This book is saturated with the atmosphere of illness, and has filled many readers with indignation and even alarm. A considerable percentage of his friends have been anxious lest some morbid factor in his temperament may have been responsible for the detailed dwelling upon horrible physical conditions, increasingly noticeable in his books ; and the sinister names associated with the cult of pain for its own sake have been mentioned in connection with him. It is quite certain that Hugh Benson watched his sensations with extreme accuracy, and shrank from no crudeness or materialism of statement in order to convey them to his audience. He even created them, as when he “slapped his arm” with the primula to study the consequent irritation ; and placed himself as deliberately in imagination on the rack as he did, physically, in the electrocution chair ; and he himself assures us that, after writing of the martyr's torture, he was “conscious of very distinct, even slightly painful, sensations in his (own) wrists and ankles.” Pain he undoubtedly suffered to a very miserable extent before his operation on January 2, 1913 ; but it is due to a misunderstanding that it has been maintained that he chose to undergo that operation without an anæsthetic in order to study pain more accurately. It is true that with one part of his inquisitive soul he looked forward quite excitedly to that experience, and, after it, cried enthusiastically to a visitor, “Have you ever had a s-severe operation ? N-n-no ? Do ! It's such an experience.” He took, however, the anæsthetic ; but on waking found that the injection of morphia, which was once administered, made him only worse. He refused any further dose and put up with the

pain, expressing himself to a friend almost in the words of Sir Nevill Fanning in *Initiation*: "I was not *in* Pain ; Pain and I were looking at each other, and he came nearer and nearer till he was upon me with a blue flash of agony." Characteristically, he passed without a break into a joke. "Do you know," he asked, "what I said under the anæsthetic? Nothing but 'Oh, God.' The nurses thought it was so pious! But *it wasn't pious*. It was a swear!" But one can mean two things at least by so much that one may say . . . !

With regard to the roots of this interest in pain I will say this only. First, that it was not, as a matter of fact, morbid, though I will not deny that it might have been so, and very gravely, had he not, owing to temperament, "passed on" too quickly to the next thing to become really a brooder over pain or in love with it or tempted to inflict it. Moreover, his singularly practical tendency always forced him at once to register and *use* it for some outside end, nor suffered him to hug it and live with it interiorly. And his extreme sanity of natural life kept him outside even the dangerous tendencies of religious asceticism. All cruelty he hated, and saw its wrongness, even when he, in some sense, was its victim.

"I hate cruelty more than anything in the whole world," he wrote to Mr. Rolfe, "and find injustice or offensiveness to myself or anyone else the hardest of all things to forgive."

His religion, finally, gave him theories of pain, and taught him that, as a fact, it was knit up with certain most august and central dogmas of the Christian Creed, sin, that is, and Redemption. After that, he could not fail to concentrate an awe-struck attention upon pain.

It would be easy to follow through Benson's different novels his assertion of the function of pain in the Christian

scheme. As a matter of fact, nurtured as he was upon Catholic ascetical theology, his theories developed little, if at all, and were mystical from the outset. He was never quite content with viewing pain merely as a punishment inflicted by an angered God upon the sinner. The story in *The Light Invisible* of the apparition of an angel *pushing* the child beneath the cart-wheels, shows that pain may be a gift offered and desirable, and at the head of that chapter he quotes, again from Mr. A. C. Benson, “I am free! I *choose* the pain thou bearest.” Again, in the chapter *With Dyed Garments*, a series of blood-red accidents reveals Christ incarnate, as it were, in His suffering faithful. That the Christian can, precisely by his pain, be in Christ, and in a sense, *be* Christ, and effect Christ’s own work, is the ascetical secret beyond which, in reality, none other lies.

This philosophy exists, unaltered, but more fully expressed in the novel *Initiation*, written in 1913 after his operation.

Sir Nevill Fanning was a young baronet, a hereditary Catholic who took his spiritual legacy as much for granted as his social. To him nature had given every gift save health.<sup>1</sup> He had constant headaches ; blinding, sometimes. And he resented this as unfair.

I can’t fit that kind of thing into my philosophy. I try to behave decently, of course ; but I don’t submit in the slightest. I resent that kind of thing furiously, exactly as I resent cruelty to animals.

He encounters, on the exquisite Italian hillside of Frascati, a Pietà.

<sup>1</sup> I shall say, below (p. 365), how Benson regarded the *substitutional* position of a sufferer as all-important. Any Christian could vicariously suffer for his fellow. This same motive of substitution, on the physiological plane, is sounded throughout the book, but very gently. Benson meant his readers to see a good deal between the lines, and to perceive for themselves in what sense Nevill was paying for the sins of his near forefathers.

"There!" he said. "That was exactly what I meant! I think such things are perfectly horrible! What possible good can that do to anyone?"

Like his headaches, the suffering was a fact. But why attend to it? Why talk about it? (Yet in the end, Nevill Fanning will build a Pietà on the radiant lawn at Hartley.<sup>1</sup>)

He knew that somehow "Catholicism meant the Cross," while the fundamental emotion of life, to him so far, was joy. Enid Bessington, with whom he fell in love, crystalised the whole affair for him in an epigram. "Pain," she said suddenly, "is a kind of physical sin, don't you think?" "That's exactly it!" he cried in delight. "It's a thing to be resisted."

Nevill returns to England and his home. The headaches increase; he spends sleepless nights watching whole regiments of horses gallop backwards and forwards through his brain. Everyone has his own method of visualising headache. The hoofs of Benson's horses, drumming, never quite in time, and in endless advance and recession, within the skull, have a horror of their own, which we may hope he experienced not too often. The summer passes, on the whole happily; Enid is admirably in place, as *fiancée*, at Hartley: bathing, fishing, fill delicious hours. Then over Nevill's horizons mists begin to fall; across white films a hundred spiders spin, as he looks, a web of black: it is plain that he is going blind. But the crisis is slow in coming; Enid jilts him, and Jim, his small nephew, questions him remorselessly about the Holy Grail; his soul is driven deeper into itself, and, again, explores behind the

<sup>1</sup> Is it but the most singular of coincidences that I find in Archbishop Benson's *Life* that after the death of his son Martin, he wrote these words: "I used to be unable to bear pictures of the Entombment, and to turn away from the Pietà, and would never have a copy of even Francia's. But now I do know why MORTUUS ET SEPULTUS EST is in the Creeds, better than all the Books about it tell."

scenery of things ; his spiritual eyes are opening as the world darkens round him. Veils were placed on the eyes of Initiates of old : for Nevill, too, *παθεῖν μάθος* ; suffering grew towards wisdom, and by the gradual withdrawal of outward consolations left him freer to attend to the mystery they enshrined. Operation was declared imperative : a tumour on the brain causes the headaches and the blindness. Nevill, who had already, after the breaking off of his engagement, moved into the room where his father, dying, had bequeathed to him the spiritual atonement of his sins even as their physical punishment had, too, outstripped his generation, knows at last that he is paying for another and accepts the duty. Nevill emigrates to Curzon Passage (which is John Street), with “St. Joseph’s” just across the way, and the most accurate description of a nursing home, its etiquette and atmosphere, occupies many pages. A sly humour, too, provides a number of crisp sentences whose inwardness will best be recognised by those devoted ladies who nursed Monsignor Benson through his own bad days. He receives the Sacraments ; all his boyhood’s instincts come surging up in the darkness from which the vision of Enid has quite faded. The moment has arrived ; and passes. With return to consciousness, he “became aware of Pain that rested on him, like a hat drawn down to his eyes. . . .” It burst in low pulsations, quite outside him, noiseless explosions from a point, and of an electric blue colour. . . . Nevill, like Benson, has exclaimed no more than, “Oh my God !” ; like him, he deprecates more morphia ; he smokes halved cigarettes ; he asks for “a book or two,”—for he can see.<sup>1</sup> Is he then cured ? Far

<sup>1</sup> We are not told that he got them. Hugh Benson did, of course, and argued hotly that Nevill Fanning did ; but I think the remonstrances of his friends persuaded him to leave the affair ambiguous. Novel-reading is improbable a day or two after a tumour has been partly removed from the brain. . . .

from it. The growth in the brain could never be eradicated. In a few hours he is told that his remaining life can be counted only by months.

Monsignor Benson draws in detail the solemn approach of his death, and the agony through which the light of full Initiation dawned. Here it is enough to say that the wholly emancipated soul passed without difficulty, out of the horrible ruin of its body, into a knowledge and joy unforeseen and undesired had the cup only of this world's pleasure, and not the bitter Grail, been held to Sir Nevill's lips. He could meet, in no shivering nakedness or desolation, the "piercing breath" of the world to which he went. A pure spirit, he rejoined, by law of nature and gift of grace, the spiritual Source of life.

Over against the man who learnt truth through pain, are set contrasted types—of course, the worldly Catholic clique in Rome, wholly superficial in a setting where insight beyond all else was postulated: the "egotistical maniac," Enid; the kindly *bouhémie* of Lord Maresfield. These preach their lesson without disguise. More careful, I think, is the delicious portrait of Algy Lennox, the very honest, ordinary young Catholic, though he too belongs to a type Benson always liked—the perfectly groomed, fairly innocent, very fresh and unquestioning young man: pitiless to the point of cruelty, meticulous in its photography, is the character of Jim, the utterly charming, utterly unimaginative small boy whom Nevill so adores, but who cannot—and no one blames him—understand the illness, even, and the death to which he comes so close—far less, the Life in that mysterious other world of which his catechism has so well taught him the dull topography. Subtlest of all is Anna Fanning, Nevill's aunt, profoundly pious, spiritual, and unselfish, yet still needing to be taught by that veteran.



Initiate, Mr. Morpeth, that she was clinging, in spite of all, to self, jealous of the God with Whom Nevill was learning to be content, on Whom he found he could rest, nor have to turn as of old to her for consolation. . . .

In this book, then, Benson stated his doctrine that it may be Pain which awakens a man's soul when nothing else can, though of course he did not prove it. Easily it can be argued that Pain may contract, numb, cripple, or embitter a soul, and drive it into disbelief, cynicism, or despair. He would not deny this; but simply showed you a case in which Pain had proved successful. That is the artist's privilege. Grant me, he demands, the elements I ask; I will mix them, and add another, and I defy you to quarrel with the results. He will not deny that if Nevill is thus “initiated,” developed, not made more impotent and blind, he must have contained, from the outset, fine unused ingredients of character: he cannot have been intrinsically *trash*; shoddy in fibre. He will agree that not every soul is worthy of Pain. Not indiscriminately will God grant His privilege of suffering. God permits no winds to blow which might quench a flickering wick, and refuses the shock which breaks the enfeebled reed. But, granting a soul of royal quality, Pain, he teaches, all but infallibly must perfect it. The Crucified is there for proof; to Him the true Christian asks but to be assimilated. Convinced of this, he wrote the book at ease and flowingly.<sup>1</sup> And I think he could have pointed to its verification in his own experience. I have felt, and his more intimate friends have largely corroborated this, that his operation marks in him a real stage of spiritual development. At last boyhood

<sup>1</sup> This book, too, grew independently, as it were. It was his spontaneous creation; not the laboured edifice of art. He had meant Enid to marry Nevill. One day their famous quarrel appeared upon his paper. “Oh dear,” he cried, much annoyed with his restive characters, “now they can *never* marry!”

was over. Maturity seemed to have arrived or to be swift upon the road. Not that his outward manner was noticeably other : but a change had been passed through ; and the distinct ageing visible in his face only reflected a deepening and *making solemn*, so to put it, of his soul.

It must not for a moment be imagined that he rashly *imposed* pain as a universal remedy, or tonic, upon all souls whom he directed. "Pain," I have already quoted from him, "is a vocation like another." God might not call this soul or that, at any given moment, towards pain. Least of all is illness to be sought, or necessarily to be cherished. He did not share the singular doctrine, once popular, that it was almost impossible for a really healthy person to reach high virtue.

"For myself, too," he wrote in 1902, "I am so inclined to feel that illness does my soul no good—one's prayers and one's sense of the presence of God seem to be enfeebled. . . . But since suffering is so mysteriously connected with sin—and since the Atonement took the form of suffering—one cannot help hoping that every single pang adds something real to redemption, even if it leaves oneself apparently further from God."

He was careful to discourage depressing themes of meditation and prayer in time of sickness, and was particularly emphatic on the duty of soothing nerves and resting brain.

"Don't be ashamed of having to smoke," he wrote to a lady whom he was directing to no low path of virtue. "I am afraid one cigarette a day won't be much good, however."

And again :

"Certainly read novels. It becomes a work of charity : and papers."

And on a higher plane :

"When you feel bored and tired, don't go on looking for minute occasions for mortification. . . . Searching further

will only tire and disgust you when you are in such a mood. Neither in this mood should I pray much for guidance in minute points.”

“Go to sleep,” he wrote to the same person, “under the anæsthetic in His arms ; and awake in them again, happy.”

He did not, however, confine his stern doctrine to his novels, and send individual penitents to heaven in cushioned palanquins. He would insist that we needlessly create for ourselves half our suffering. The exaggerated cultus of the body focuses our attention upon pain, illicitly ; and athletes, he holds, “hate pain more than anyone.” “I myself,” he loves to quote, “am my fever and my pain.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, mental suffering is largely allowed by him to be but an echo, rather, of the physical, than a directly psychic trial. Not that it need be held trivial for that.

In December, 1903, he wrote to the same penitent :

. . . . I agree that many of your sufferings of mind are plainly due to your illness and operation ; and that it is through that that God has chosen to accept your offering of yourself. When one has said a thing is physical, however, one does not mean that it is not spiritual ; simply because we are sacramental organisms. With regard to James’ book which you speak of, and which I read too, with immense interest, that is surely true. To say that impressions come to us through physical causes is saying no more than that we consist of body and soul. The mystery remains exactly where it was before. The question is not, Through what channels do they come, but, Why do they come, and why are they what they are ?

But, of course, he never flinches : suffering remains God’s wonted method, and if illness has these dangers, health holds its perils, and convalescence even more distinctly has its own.

<sup>1</sup> An approximate quotation from the old English song, “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly. . . .”

Of course convalescence is notoriously the most trying time for spiritual comforts. The centre of gravity has to be shifted more or less to the physical being; and the spiritual being is left gasping. But it is only a question of waiting till the tide comes in again. (There is a mixed metaphor ! !)

And, rising again, he sings the praise of suffering deliberately welcomed, when God offers it.

"Everything else," he writes in 1901, "sinks into unimportance—acts of the intellect or heart cannot come *near* the objective value of a will that is being tested by pain and simply holds on. If I were not such a coward I would almost envy your opportunities of grace—Mass itself hardly 'shows the Lord's death' more clearly than suffering that is received for His sake."

And to a writer in *Great Thoughts* for January 7, 1911, after carefully safeguarding himself against any charge of that Gnosticism which in all ages has issued, through its contempt of the body, into savage asceticism or wanton immorality, he goes so far as to declare that "Catholic mysticism teaches that the highest vocation of the body is to suffer, not blindly or contemptuously, but deliberately. . . . 'I am crucified with Christ.' Non-Catholic mysticism ignores the body as an instrument of suffering. Have you ever read James Hinton on the mystery of pain? <sup>1</sup> It is on these lines to a certain extent that some of my works are written."

But it would be wholly to distort his doctrine about suffering were I to suggest that he placed even its purgatorial

<sup>1</sup> He often alludes to this book, and of course was devoted to Huysmans' *Ste. Lidwine de Schiedam*. He was indignant with a friend who professed herself "disgusted with it," and demanded to buy the book from her, as she was unworthy to possess what she could not appreciate. Her volume was a library book, not to be disposed off; she hastened, therefore, to buy a *Ste. Lidwine*, and to have those leprous pages bound in "daintiest pale blue and white with just a touch of gold." She forwarded the book to Hare Street as a Christmas present. Monsignor Benson was beyond words delighted.

value in the first place, in so far, at least, as that purgation might be conceived as confined to the soul of the sufferer. The Christian, owing to his mystical but supremely real incorporation with Christ Crucified, “fills up what is wanting” in His sufferings, and, by his pain, atones and obtains.

“Suffering,” Father Benson wrote to another correspondent, “is vicarious and redemptive. The whole human race is one, not many, and the suffering of one really balances the sin of another. This is the idea that M. Huysmans makes so much of continually—uniting all on to the one Saviour who ‘bore our sins.’ In fact, this is the only conceivable explanation.”

And while he was at Rome an episode occurs in which he put into deliberate practice his theory which, after all, was not his, nor yet mere theory, but essential Christian dogma. That penitent to whom he wrote, with a sense of tenderness which I am inclined to consider unique in his correspondence, the letters from which I have chiefly quoted in this section, found herself plunged in profound desolation, and this he deliberately regarded as her Gethsemane, and assured her that God had finished His work upon her intelligence (she was trying to see her way into the Church, or to remaining out of it, and either course seemed blocked), and was fashioning her spiritually through pain. But pain, Hugh Benson thought, was more than she now could bear. He would assume it in her place. He offers, with infinite diffidence, a “mystical substitution.” He has, he writes, tested the possibility of this in two cases. Once, another undertook to suffer on his behalf, when “I was in the very greatest misery of mind and soul, almost frantic with doubt about the work and the Church of England.” Just before a mission, the torment was wholly lifted from him by a friend. “The other time,” he says with much

simplicity, "I did it for someone else." And now, he offers to do it for her. "I owe you so much in every way ;" and he likes to feel God is giving him definite work for a soul. He is not, he urges, presumptuous.

That sort of thing is not at all reserved for the Contemplatives and Religious Orders ; people of the most ordinary and sinful sorts do it every day in various forms. It is just the literal acceptance of "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "I shall give Him no rest," he continues, "until He gives you rest."

. . . Please let me say once and for all that you SHALL get a full and clear light from GOD, if incessant prayer from such a sinner as I am can do anything. I can't do much ; but I can go on doing that until He hears and answers.

God took him at his word, as regards his penitent. The shadow lifted from her, but I do not think it was permitted to descend, then at any rate, on himself. God visited his soul with new consolations, and, if he was at the stake, he felt no fire.

Such, then, was Benson's attitude to pain. Utterly unsentimental here as elsewhere, able to regard the enthusiastic convert's petition for hair-shirt and for discipline as part of the psychic phase—"they all go through it"—he did not himself disdain those traditional lessonings of the flesh. Strongly built and fond of hard exercise, keen of sense and alert of brain and fearless in the registering of each sensation as it came, he remained his own master, on the whole, in pleasure as in pain, welcoming both, practising his own ceaselessly repeated doctrine that one must *grasp* the nettle ; above all, passing beyond the theories by which he justified his instinct ; beyond even the unanimous proclamation of the saints, God's experts in sanctity, of all the ages ; and content with the supreme example set him by his Crucifix and with the final experience of

that spiritual peace which follows after and is in the storm.

In writing of *The Necromancers* I said that all his life Hugh Benson had been pursued by a sense of fear. Fear may be physical, when it consists in the sensitive shrinking from what seems perilous, or even merely difficult : or mental, when its origin and field of operation, so to say, are confined to the soul. For though, in human nature, no emotion is purely physical, some psychic disturbances may, speaking roughly, be so confined to the spiritual area as only secondarily to overflow into the senses : a horror born of the thought of sin, of annihilation, of treachery may end by making the flesh to creep and to grow cold ; and this differs, it is clear, from that fear of the rack, or of cancer, or of suffocation, which at last makes the soul grow sick. Between the two may stand the fear of, say, public humiliation, or of loneliness ; and worst of all is the panic fear of one knows not what ; the consciousness of some mysterious spiritual presence, or absence, or pursuit, threatening the blind and paralysed soul. To all these terrors Hugh Benson temperamentally fell a prey.

The child who was so eager to experiment, so inventive and adventurous, shrank nearly always from the plunge he took so quickly. In some points, he remained unable wholly to conquer his emotional reaction—the fear of the dark ; the horror of the dentist’s chair. But here fear of pain or of the unknown complicate that simpler dread of the dangerous of which I meant first to speak.

In his *Coward* he relates rather accurately a number of his own experiences, though here surmise, I confess, has somewhat to supplement the evidence. Not that I

suggest for a moment that Benson *was* a coward. Exactly the opposite.

"A. B.," Mrs. Benson once wrote to her son, "is awfully attached to you, as an undecided and not courageous man clings to one who certainly WITH ALL HIS FAULTS is not a coward. . . ." "Oh dear!" she cries, again, "You can do nothing with a COWARD!"

But for all that, Aristotle's dictum remains true, that nobody who cannot *feel fear*, deserves to be called courageous. The brave man is not the apathetic or the foolhardy, but he who conquers fear; and the bravest, he who most consistently, most swiftly and most deliberately conquers the keenest-felt of fears.

Valentine Medd is the central figure of *The Coward*, the younger son of the Medd family. Over against him are set, as usual, all manner of personages by way of contrast—old General Medd, who incarnates in himself the Medd tradition, of which unthinking courage was a part; Lady Beatrice, his wife, who by her own descent was prepared to share it when her marriage linked her with its actual representative, and who never understood, fully, her own son; Austin is their successful elder boy; May, their daughter; Gertie, for a while, Val's *fiancée*. And nowhere, perhaps, has Benson been able to give rein to his caustic description of the life of a really big country-house so completely as he does here. The enormous solemnity, even in hours of merriment and flurry, of that existence; the ponderous forward crash of the machine of etiquette and custom; the transforming of all life into a function, a cumbrous ritual meaning nothing, is lashed by Benson the more relentlessly, somehow, because he liked it all so very much himself.



In it, Val is something of a pariah. He has nerves. He can *shrink*. At school, he has faked at football; at home, Quentin has thrown him, and horses, for the time, ceased to appeal to him. In each of these cases, Val had every excuse . . . certainly, there was no excuse he failed to make for himself, in his own mind. Half the boy's life is an unconfessed play-acting, with himself for audience. He goes to Switzerland; and Hugh Benson's own climbs supply him with data for some vivid pages. At the Riffelalp Val learns to climb: he succeeds, and is illegitimately exultant: he wants to boast. Imagination represents him to himself at a thousand perilous points, at each triumphant. He disobeys an order, out of contempt for the careful discipline imposed by experienced guides: he is rebuked, humiliated, and enraged. A word of praise restores him to self-esteem. He apologises, and is happy till the irreproachable Austin snubs him. The brothers quarrel. It is clear that their temperaments clash. Pitiless is Austin, after Val's terrible display of lost head, collapsed nerves, and failure at a crisis during the next day's climb. "You see I just hadn't the head for it," Val airily would declare, when he had recovered from his "agony of self-contempt and misery." There had been V.C.'s who "turned green in the face" when they looked down precipices. . . . He was one of those. With this pose, his self-respect stood or fell, and to it he clung,—successfully, save in the silent hours when, for instance, he stared at the bit of rock Austin had picked up on the Matterhorn, and which *might have been his*, had he not faked.

He falls in love with Gertie, but quails before his brother who accuses him of it: Gertie's mare bolts; he stops her on the brink of a quarry; but knows in his heart that had he missed her rein at that important point,

sixty yards from the edge, he would have pulled up, and let her tear ahead and over. Of what use to sacrifice his own life too . . . ? But Gertie did not know that. In an ecstasy of pride, she engages herself to this her Man.

Poor Gertie ! She, with May and the two brothers, travels to Rome. An Italian insults her ; Val strikes him, is challenged, and funks the duel, which Austin fights for him, being wounded, and returning home a hero. Val comes back an outcast, rejected now by Gertie, and treated by the rest of his family with a brutality which is only eclipsed for us by their paralysing stupidity. Yes, the stupidity of this unseeing race is what remains most of all in our shocked memories, despite the really splendid psychology which Benson displays in his study of Val's shrinking, dwindling soul.

Not even Val's old nurse Benty, exquisitely modelled, even in detail, on Hugh's recollection of his own nurse, Beth, can recover the trust of that now isolated heart. Still less can Lady Beatrice reach her boy. The General consents to allow Val to continue living under the Medhurst roof : he will not be removed from Cambridge, even ; no public disgrace will be inflicted . . . but a wall of ice is built, built far more solidly and impermeably, I confess, by Valentine himself. Into the ice-house steals, gradually, Father Maple's music : at first you would suppose the tears of this boy's soul to have frozen hard once more : certainly the egregious Professor Mackintosh does his best to blight, in his brain, the thoughts of God and immortality. . . . The lad determines to commit suicide ; he has bought the poison. . . . This shall be his test case. He balances, in the dead of night, the issues : he fails ; he creeps into bed, after his long play-acting, sobbing and

moaning aloud. He knew he had *never* even meant to kill himself. He had not the courage. . . .

However, he goes to Father Maple. The priest reads him a simple little lecture on the distinction between nerves, imagination, and will ; their conflict, education, and co-operation. He teaches the boy to begin to strengthen his will. That we “can’t change,” as the determinist Professor had asserted, was, he announced, “a black lie.” Encouraged, the boy departs, hoping for some great opportunity in which he might prove his courage. It comes : the family has left on a visit—Val is alone in the house, and a fire breaks out. He takes the rescue work in hand, and does splendidly, to the last, when his nerve breaks down : he screams at a barred window : the floor gives and he is engulfed, revealed a coward to the very end, as Lady Beatrice still feels, in spite of Father Maple’s gentle lessoning.

“I am so glad,” Hugh wrote to a friend, “you like *The Coward*. I like it myself. Really I think I am dispassionate about my books : I don’t like some at all. But I’m not sure that the British Public will. . . .”

As far as I can gather, that public has not thought enough about the book to like or dislike it actively ; perhaps not all because cowardice was distasteful to it, but because such *second-rateness*, as Val must be supposed to have suffered from, seemed too ordinary an affair to make so much of a to-do about : most people, our rather nerveless generation perceives, stand more or less in Val Medd’s shoes. Benson would have agreed, and argued that worse than untrustworthy nerves and riotous imagination in a soul of sterling essential value, like his hero’s, was the lack of appetite for high things which the average man accepts so quietly.

In fact, he wrote a whole book upon that Average Man.

It relates the collapse, in a modern boy, of all nobler aspiration, sapped by the influences of money and position. The friend who once meant much to him is dropped ; the girl with whom he had had no merely childish love affair was left to the contemptuous summons of a rake ; the religion which had dawned for him so exquisitely dwindled, too, into the light of common day. The melancholy picture is redeemed, for those who have the heart to contemplate it, by a companion picture, Mr. Main, the curate with the cynical unbelieving wife, who for conscience' sake and the Catholic faith abandons curacy and pension, and, monumentally incompetent, seeks a place in life's struggle as a commercial traveller. Hopelessly unfit, he goes to the wall ; he loses "everything, but not his soul" ; soon, he will be left with nothing but God. There, beside the tragedy of the physical cowardice, is set that of the moral. But since in this book the note of positive fear is not loudly struck, I will not insist upon it here.

But to downright mental panic that has no knowledge of its object, is there a book of Benson's that does not bear a tremendous witness ? In *The Light Invisible* it displays itself more as a vague weariness felt by the soul in the presence of some wrong it intuitively perceives but cannot grasp. In *The Coward* it is felt by Benty and Lady Beatrice herself on the night when the whole house is anxious with the spectral emotions thrown off by the soul of the boy so close to suicide. "Fear, full-armed, rushed on with the approaching wheels," when Mrs. Nugent, in the candle-lit bedroom, listened to the carriage that brought towards her house Laurence, and in his soul a devil. Its climax is shown when Maggie Deronnais watched through the night, in the smoking-room, with Laurence. With every possible weapon Benson assaults our nerves : the boy's apathy ; his

malevolence ; his filth and blasphemy ; his silent nauseating laugh ; finally, his purely spiritual onslaught. Even so, Hugh Benson lets us understand worse was in store for the soul of the praying girl. All these attacks had reached her from without ; now the terror came upon her, running swiftly up and silently from the recesses of her soul ; she was up against an Ultimate, a Sin, in this case ; that which was too far back at the roots of things to be analysed and thus defined ; Terror itself.

As in the case of pain, Monsignor Benson dealt bravely and indeed cheerfully with this profounder trial. In pain, the foundations of the soul are attacked ; in fear, they are withdrawn. Concerning fear sprung from the doubt of one's predestination, he wrote as follows in the March of 1903 :

As to fear, the solution lies somewhere between “despising it” and “fainting” under it. It is surely as much a chastening of the Lord as pain. Yet we are right in seeking to be relieved from pain. To “despise” the motive of fear leads to presumption, and to “faint” under it, to despair. . . . (1) I should advise you meeting the temptation of God's preknowledge of your salvation or ruin, by the thought of *God's will* that you should be saved. Dwell on the *all but irresistible* force of God's Will. (2) As regards the devil's foreknowledge, if it exists (which is exceedingly unlikely)—despise it and him altogether. (3) As regards the fear that your repentance is not deep enough, &c., disregard that, and fall back on those great evangelical facts as expressed in “There is life for a look.”

When the suggested fear was more selfless and a second fear arose lest *love* might not be present where the original fear, which perfect love should have cast out, was not absent, he encouraged his penitent once more :

Fear does not alienate Our Lord. May I do what the Evangelicals do to one another, “give you a text” ? (Matt. xiv. 29-33). It came into my mind directly I began to

think what I could say to express my sympathy, and my certainty that "He will make all things well."

And with his brave trust in the minuter guidance of God's Providence, he regards the very fear as a hint that the soul should seek what would evict that temptation :

About the "fear," I think God has allowed you to have it, in order to make you feel the absolute need of a strong *incarnate* support ; that you may feel that to stand alone is an impossible position, and that you must have a living Something in the world to hold you up like a great kindly Mother and say, "You need not be frightened of the dark ; I am here, and my arms are round you, and you are perfectly safe." No amount of confidence that the Mother is in the next room, or that the Father is guarding the house, will really comfort, permanently, a Child of God ; unless she is with him in the dark, to hold him tight, and to tell him of the Father, and let him tell her his sins, and be forgiven, and give him food. But you know all this, and I needn't go on. Only I can't tell you how it hurts me to hear you crying through the wall, and to know that the Mother isn't with you yet.

And though I perceive that even here he is dealing with the terror to which a *motive* still can be assigned, I imagine that in no possible spiritual state will he have other remedies to offer than trust, silence, and a "waiting until my change do come."

In February, 1905, Hugh Benson wrote to an acquaintance that "[your book has] taught me the value of loneliness." "May I say," answered his correspondent, "that experience has taught me the frightful harm of it when compulsory?" Benson began by arguing that his loneliness was due to an accident of temper :

I am perpetually quarrelling with my best friends. It is extremely annoying, and I have not an idea how to remedy it.

This piece of self-condemnation resulted in a sharp discussion, in which many of his views on friendship and his capacity or incapacity for it came to the surface :

"It seems to me," Benson wrote, "that in forming new relationships one has to advance very slowly on both sides. Otherwise, each side gets a disproportioned view of the other. I am trying to be natural, and not *over*-quick to leap to other people's points of view. The landing is never stable ; one staggers about, and finally falls back disappointed in everything. That I am quite determined to correct. Will you be content to take me on those terms, and to allow me to disagree entirely on details, and express myself frankly ? (By 'frankly' I do not mean offensively.) . . . More and more I seem to see that most of the catastrophes that happen come from mistaking details for principles, and principles for details. For example, you drink quantities of milk and I quantities of water. They are both sacramental of the same thing, not different things ; but I can imagine a lifelong rupture between people who do not understand that this is so.

"And so on.

"This is a tiresome letter ; and appears to me to be like trying to play Wagner on a Jew's harp."

"You do well," his correspondent retorted, "to be cautious and prudent."

Hugh resented this not a little :

*April 15.*

Anything is better than the eternal experience of making friends and then losing them ; I think probably both you and I have had enough of that.

But . . . I do not like to be thought "prudent and cautious" in the sense in which I am afraid you do think me so. I am only tired to death of giving myself away, and finding it too late. [Friendship had been compared by his correspondent to the spark struck out by the clash of flint and steel.] But when (Benson subsumed) the spark has been struck it needs two things : (1) enough fuel ; (2) not too much fuel. My continual fault has been to put on too much.

I am greatly bothered with trying to do five things at the same time—to be a priest, to write a book, to correct proofs, to pay bills, and to keep my friends. So you must forgive [my] possibly pessimistic sentiments.

However, the reluctance to form full and easy friendships was in Hugh Benson very deeply rooted :

*May 15.*

I don't mean to make reservations, but I don't like my own tendency to agree with people wildly.

I am really rather afraid of meeting you. I am becoming more and more afraid of meeting people I want to meet ; because my numerous deficiencies are so very apparent. For example, I stammer slightly always ; and badly at times ; and so on, and so on.

During these months of downright embittered loneliness, these physical shortcomings really depressed the priest.

*August 21, 1905.*

For goodness' sake don't hint that I am a Personage : I am a nervous stammering Fool. . . .

Myself. Yes : I am MUCH more impressive at a distance. I am all that your friend<sup>1</sup> says as to insignificance : and look about 25 years old. I loathe being photographed ; but can send you one (probably) of myself, when I was at Eton and steered a boat. Shall I ? I am not in the least like it now. Occasionally I can preach ; but only occasionally, when I go perfectly mad and howl and rave in the pulpit ; but that is only on special occasions. . . . I am shy, conceited, sensitive. . . There you have it !

That is why, like Newman—of whom men quoted : “Thou could'st a people raise ; thou couldst not lead”—Benson felt that his function was to be one of intermittent stimulus rather than of constant and substantial support. This in itself, he recognised, meant that by each new

<sup>1</sup> A young religious had told his correspondent that Benson looked an insignificant little fellow, but that when he had spoken ten words the whole county listened ecstatically.



acquaintance his ministry procured him, he would sooner or later be left, as it were, behind or himself he would out-pass them. Of one who needed constant and minute spiritual care he wrote :

The cure will NEVER be finished : . . all I hope for him is that he may die in grace. I should be really happy if he died peacefully of pneumonia. I want him to be just propped up till that happens. If you can do more, you will be a worker of miracles. I am not the man to prop : I can kindle, sometimes, but not support. People come to me, and pass on.

In consequence, he took up an interior attitude, or thought he did, which was so austere as to seem all but pessimist ; and in its literary expression reaches the fringe of cynicism.

My chief efforts are directed towards making “friendliness” a negative, not a positive thing : Positive friendliness takes so much time, and I have so little !—and such an ENORMOUS number of people who want it. . . . Frankly, I do not often try to get into close relations with people ; and I never try twice with the same person : I learned that lesson finally, nine years ago. I found solitude six years ago, inside : it is only an expression of it that I am looking for.

And just before leaving Cambridge, where all the letters from which I have so far quoted were written, he was preparing a sermon on “The Solitude of the Soul.” Let me say at once that I do not think he yet had succeeded, fully, in turning his undoubted loneliness into the solitude of the saint ; loneliness at best can be acquiesced in : solitude may be passionately loved, not because of the relief from those who are not there, but for His sake who is.

The developed doctrine of *Loneliness* is to be found in the posthumous novel which so pathetically bears that name. A Catholic girl, Marion Tenterden, you will

remember, had, for apparent vocation, the being a *prima donna*: Norah Merival, in love—not with the exquisite soprano, but with her foreseen success—adopted her, introduced her to her father, an enormously rich banker recently made a peer, and thus she met Max Merival. Shooting stags and catching fish and gradually falling in love occupy Marion and Max for three rather tedious chapters: only with Marion's home-life in the Standing cottage—Standing is very much of a Hare Street—does human interest really enter the book, and then it is due chiefly to the charming creation of Maggie Brent, whose vague helplessness coupled with heroic unselfishness provokes to tears and laughter. Also a mystical element is added. Maggie's religion fades, as the glaring footlights approach to dazzle her. The first book ends, however, with a triumph at Covent Garden and an accomplished betrothal, still, however, to be kept secret. Lord and Lady Merival would object to their only son marrying a *prima donna*.

At a great reception held by Lady Merival, Marion is introduced to a rather cheekily-drawn Royalty (if I may use that adverb—none other seems quite appropriate), and at this climax of her young fame tells Max she fears some trouble, over their engagement, with her priest. She foresees Max will not give the "promises" . . . never should a future Merival be brought up Catholic! However, "Religion, whatever else it was for, was certainly never meant to trouble and upset people: and I'm determined it shan't, in our case, anyhow." She would go and see the priest—and if there was no way out—well, things would have to take their course.

Father Franklin, S.J., of Farm Street, was found by Marion Tenterden coming upstairs from a five-o'clock cup

of tea in his refectory. This was improbable ; but quite impossible was it that he should agree with her that the “promises,” to be made by the parties in a mixed marriage, previous to the granting of a dispensation, were the invention of the *Ne Temere* decree. These trifling flaws, however, would have disappeared if the book had been revised. The essential point is that she resolves to get married, without promises and without dispensation, entering upon a marriage, in consequence, which was no marriage, and apostatising, in practice, from the Church she had been brought up in. In theory, too ; for she soon agrees enthusiastically with courteous old Sir Robert Mainwaring, who is a good Christian, but unattached to sect, and can congratulate her on her own undenominational width of view. So too can Mr. Cholmondeley, Rector of Standing ; so cannot, need I say, little Father Denny, her parish priest, appalled to the verge of despair at the thought of what Marion means to do. And indeed, even a year’s excitement and a month or two of success, could hardly, I imagine, have worked this radical alteration in her character. For it is difficult suddenly to reverse the religious processes of one’s life. Whether or no her change be psychologically conceivable scarcely matters. We must accept it as having happened.

Then God begins to strike. Something goes wrong with her tonsils : she has an operation : her voice is lost. Bitterness invades her ; she tells Maggie Brent of her determination to marry Merival without the dispensation and Maggie cannot understand. Endlessly kind and loving, she cannot understand. Only Max, Marion feels, can understand. And yet—now that all claim to glory has been lost by Marion, Max hesitates : and when Maggie is killed by a dog-cart accident, Marion begins to wonder whether she

has not, after all, lost the only one who ever had understood. Into the appalling emptiness which now began to form itself around her, Maggie's spirit entered, "terrifying and sweet," like her dying smile. The rose-garden at early dawn was lonely : the church with its lamp, like the solitary star of morning, was lonely too : but in both was a positive quality—a Presence to which the girl had as yet not attended. . . . Somehow the wheels of her spirit are set running back along their former grooves : Marion goes to confession. In her hour of illumination she sees, I think, that Max's love has faltered, to this extent at least that he will accept his freedom if she offers it. And offer it she must, as now she knows perfectly that she can marry him only as a Catholic. Nor will she hesitate. In the rose-garden God has walked with her ; at dawn, this time ; and she has not hidden herself. She is prepared to live her life out, alone with God. Max visits her ; she tells him : it goes as she foresaw ; she is left in the lonely cottage garden with none but the Divine Lover for companion.

I should like to find the roots of this solitary habit of spirit, which in its unchosen moments made for loneliness. As Benson's courage was the product of a temperamental fear dealt with heroically by will, and even as his joy was "three parts pain," so too his love of solitude was the sanctified form of an essential but manifold tendency to aloofness which was not all, in many of its constituents, good. He had the inclination to domineer : and princes, Aristotle said, too often have no friends. He went in all things *fast* : and friendship grows slowly to perfection : it is, too, at its surest when unconscious, or at least, unstudied : his consciousness was always alert ; always he stood outside and watched, not knowing that he did this,

yet analysing, for all that, his nearest friends and relatives themselves, and counting up their ways. He stood back, too, as I have said, and watched and counted up himself, and that at times leaves the soul which lives within our soul and examines Self, quite shivering in its loneliness. For to examine one's friends, even subconsciously, differentiates them, puts them at a distance, and almost always, telepathically, so to say, conveys to them a consciousness of the cleavage between two personalities. They stiffen in spite of themselves, and cannot act quite naturally. And similarly, the outer self which the inner self examines, is chilled by this assessment, and refuses its communications, and the critic within is deprived even of the food his criticism needs, and knows himself left desolate. The inferior artist, then, stands back and sees and appreciates all life, often enough without loving. The *faults* strike him first. And Benson's tendency was *first* to see the faults. I will quote from a letter, significant chiefly when taken in the mass, but also illustrating, in one sentence at least, this particular point. It will show how he resisted this tendency at any rate, but also how in this very resistance a principle and other allied principles were his which made yet further for aloofness.

. . . My whole principle in dealing with people of every kind is to make the best of them, and deliberately to ignore their deficiencies as much as possible. I find it so much easier and more “natural” to do the opposite of this and to dwell on their faults, that I am obliged, for the sake of charity, to make this rule [. . .]

I find it very hard to enter into “explanations.” I find it nearly always useless. Therefore, I always say less than I think [. . .]

[I do not say these are the best rules for everybody : I only say that they are the only ones for me . . .]

The last is that, as a rule, I neither thank others nor

desire to be thanked myself for things done for God's sake. "Thanking" seems to me to deprive one of the Divine reward.

Besides all this, or perhaps accounting for it, I seem to find in him a certain layer of what I can only call *hardness*. There is the hardness of the logician, which he certainly possessed in a high degree.<sup>1</sup> There is the hardness, too, of the no longer second-rate but supreme and first-rate artist, who has to have a will of iron lest he yield himself utterly to the spell of beauty and remain in idle intoxication wholly at its mercy ; or again, pour himself out like water down whatever slope its irresistible charm may summon him, and so excel in nothing. This hardness, then, which is a self-protection, is necessary and right for the artist. There is for him, however, an instinctive self-protection that is selfish. The artist despises the Philistine and refuses him his pearls ; and he shrinks, panic-stricken, from the Goth and Vandal, whose hoofs will hurt should his soul lie exposed to their trampling. He shuts himself up, therefore, underneath an armour of austerity which blunts, or of frivolity, which deflects their onslaught, or just within a hermitage ; and thus there is the readiness to do without others, not because a man feels he has so little within himself that he dare not share it, but because he has so much that he needs to share in no one else's treasures. There is, finally, I think, a sort of hardness so purely temperamental that it simply defies all explanation, being an ultimate. You find it often in races possessed of exquisite sensibility, subject to the illusions of melancholy, vivid, impressionable,

<sup>1</sup> This was singular, for it is a Latin quality rather than English, and expresses itself incidentally in the treatment of the lower animals, and is allied with wit rather than humour. Now Hugh Benson was essentially English, loathed even the appearance of cruelty, and was not, I should say, witty, for all his sense of humour.

and the victims of moods—like, shall we say, the Poles or the Bretons or the Irish. Suddenly there is to be recognised that “hard streak” which may be in part at least responsible for a wonderful virginity of soul and body, the more marvellous for the yielding, communicative qualities above and below. The Englishman, far more sentimental, makes up for it by a certain dull pushfulness, which ends in his, as he says, “muddling through.” The Teuton, yet more sentimental, has, to prevent his vision melting into vapour, to encase himself and it in one long self-suggestion, a plate-armour of ideas, rigidly interconnected and impervious to all outside influences.

All these hardnesses existed somewhere in Hugh Benson ; he knew of them, and fostered or fought them according as he thought they made for good or ill. At times this made his behaviour a little unequal. He firmly believed in two seemingly incompatible duties : one, that he must be absolutely accessible to everyone, and must communicate all that he possessed to as wide a circle as possible ; and yet, that he must preserve utterly inviolate the inner places and the precious things of his own soul. When he felt himself shrinking overmuch, he “dealt himself shrewd slaps,” as in the matter of money, by signing out large cheques of communicativeness. And at other times his “gush,” as one of his closest friends has called it, was consciously in self-defence, a ready tossing out of what he *could* give to compensate for the resolute hoarding of what he would not. And yet again, his rapid meeting of another’s thoughts, his vivid sympathy with what he from his view-point saw, was due to his dramatic power of throwing himself into that other’s place, which he did, if not spontaneously, deliberately, and because he felt rudeness to be a sin ; rarely saying all that he personally thought, and avoiding fastidiously

that "horrible sort of plain-spokenness" which he felt he suffered from at Cambridge.

In consequence, he was continually being thought by those who did not know him really well to be pouring out his heart to them when he was doing nothing of the kind. This notion might please them, or again exasperate them, according as they were flattered by such seeming lack of reticence or disliked it in a man. Moreover, as he kept his friends to a quite extraordinary degree in watertight compartments, so that persons with whom he had a very great deal to do did not know one another even by name, people kept fancying that they stood in some quite unique relation to him and displayed a tendency to proclaim a monopoly in his affections or his confidences. Those, however, who knew him really well and were his habitual and chosen associates, and to whom he certainly revealed far more of himself than to most, are unanimous in their conviction that there not only was, but that they *felt* that there was, a wholly and deliberately uncommunicated self behind the charm and the playfulness and the mercurial versatility, and even the ever developing *unselfishness*. He had tried, he said, to form intimacies ; God had not willed him to succeed. What he appeared to get he could not keep ; and after a time he took the hint, and when such things seemed about to form, "gently shook himself free." He agrees to what all who loved him with knowledge must assert, that he went to his grave without even one really intimate friend.

Before, then, this man who gradually learnt to keep his soul independent, yet without pride ; without illusions, yet not morose ; concentrated, yet self-spending, we are forced to offer homage. For indeed the construction and the preservation of so secret a shrine are not achieved save at a terrible expense. Benson must have suffered—more deeply



than by impact of pain and the sick withdrawals and collapse of Fear—by that intrinsic horror which attends all apparent dwindling of the self towards an ultimate annihilation. And, while he courageously allows this dealing of God to proceed alike in the worlds of nature and of grace, there is a wistfulness about him and a weakness and a pathos of a most human sort which touches us even more than does the sharper pain. But when, indeed, the process is nearing accomplishment, and it is perceived that God has filled the empty spaces which echoed hollowly around and in the soul, our homage grows other and deeper. *Solus cum solo*. The “utter fate of fate reserved for the Immortals !” All this priest’s inmost soul was one of *worship*.

## CHAPTER VI

### "NONE OTHER GODS"

In that happy night,  
In secret, seen of none,  
Seeing nought myself,  
Without other light or guide  
Save that which in my heart was burning,

That light guided me  
More surely than the noonday sun  
To the place where He was waiting for me,  
Whom I knew well,  
And where none but He appeared.

O, guiding night ;  
O, night more lovely than the dawn ;  
O, night that hast united  
The Lover with His beloved,  
And changed her into her Love.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS: *En una noche oscura.*

IN writing of Monsignor Benson's innermost or "mystical" life, I am once more particularly anxious to keep strictly to what is objective, while describing his principles, methods, and ideals, rather than to catalogue his experiences and to assess their value. Even were not such a catalogue and such an assessment an impertinence amounting (as I should feel it) to a sacrilege, I have the gravest doubts whether they would be possible. The data simply are not there. His spiritual diaries are even more fragmentary than his other records ; references to his spiritual experiences in letters addressed to others demand a great deal of interpretation, and are very rare, and usually (on the surface) contradictory. Letters addressed to himself he in the last years

habitually destroyed or had them destroyed by others. The memories of penitents, to whom he spoke of these things, are active to add, subtract, and recast. It is safest, then, to set out sufficient evidence for us to feel sure, as I said, of his starting-point, path, and goal, supplementing these a very little with the help of those few whose knowledge I dare trust, and to leave any final verdict, as to his results and their value, to anyone who considers himself capable of formulating one.

Mysticism, it is often said, is the *art of divine union*. It is concerned, therefore, with the fact of man's union with God, the method of achieving and increasing it, and its consequences.

In the technical sense, no doubt, the mystical life is a name confined to a very special form of union of man's soul with God, brought about by a special divine working, and quite beyond the ordinary union effected by grace. Doubtless, in the Beatific Vision, every soul will be living by this life; actually, few do so. But in the wider sense, in which Monsignor Benson almost invariably used the word, and which is more popular, though, I suppose, less accurate than the academic sense mentioned above, every soul in which God's grace is found is living by it, even when not conscious of it. It was legitimate for him to use the word in this wider sense, provided he gave due warning; and this, it will be seen, he quite frankly did.

Catholic dogma affirms the existence of God, absolute and infinite; and of His created universe, derived, dependent, and limited. God is so utterly transcendent that no finite formula can ever be more than analogically true about Him, and His essential life can be communicated, by identity, to nothing; yet so wholly present is He everywhere, that creation is less present to itself than He is to it. Thus

on the one hand Pantheism is excluded, and on the other hand a Manichæan dualism, in which matter should be considered evil, or even sheer illusion, and outside the radius of immediate divine activity. Indeed, all creation, even in its lowest forms, is kept in being by the presence and power of the Divine Life, and is thus united to its God. As the scale of being ascends, so does the closeness, and so may the consciousness, of that union. A man has a different knowledge of God from what a brute animal has, in proportion as the human intellect transcends blind instinct. The angel's intuition, again, surpasses human thought. Thus far dogma restates the affirmations of pure reason. It, moreover, declares that it has been revealed that God has decided to raise mankind to a state of union essentially higher than what corresponds to his proper mode of being, or rather, to elevate him to a supernatural mode of being, which implies a super-human union, to which corresponds a super-human mode of consciousness. The method by which He achieves this elevation is the imparting to each soul of His "sanctifying grace," and this grace, or free favour of a new life, is merited by and given through His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom the divine and human natures are hypostatically united. It has already been explained how the work of Jesus Christ was to reinstate mankind, or such of mankind as freely corresponded with the renewed possibilities He offered them, to the plane from which, by "original sin," they had descended. Every Christian, therefore, who is by grace united to Jesus Christ, is at once in the condition of super-human union with God, and is, substantially, a mystic. Consciousness of his condition is, in this life, more or less intense or continuous in this or that individual, but does not, normally, reach the perfection of its nature till this life of time and space has

passed into its eternal condition. The Christian learns of the existence of this life by means of revelation, and may, even, entertain a humble trust—indeed, a moral certainty—that it is actually existing within himself, though probably he has no experimental knowledge of its presence. All Catholic mysticism, then, is concerned with the existence of this supernatural element, its appropriation and development, and the consciousness of its presence. Mysticism covers, therefore, first, the entire field of the Sacramental, for since in God’s plan the Divine has been irrevocably and peculiarly linked with the created in the Incarnation, all that is connected with this central fact will contain analogous elements, the spiritual and the material, combined in different ways : the God-man is reflected in His Saints, His sacraments, His sacramentals, His Mother, His Vicar, His humblest Christian. The supreme mystical summing up, so to say, is the Church, in which, by all these means, the vital and substantial union is accomplished between man, the Word made Flesh, and God. Mysticism is concerned, moreover, with all that is allied to the dogmas of Sin and Redemption, and entails every method of gradual purification and illumination. It is concerned, finally, as method, and in a sense as consummation, with prayer, since prayer in its lowlier forms leads to union, and, in its higher, *is* union.

It will be seen, then, that Catholic Mysticism has nothing primarily to do with what is allegorical or symbolical, or merely mysterious ; nothing whatever to do with sentiment, emotion, or special forms of art or dialect ; nothing, with a clique, an élite, an inner circle, for whom the Church has an esoteric doctrine unimparted to the many. It can go, at times, with an apparent and perhaps real intellectual stupidity ; certainly with unculture. It

may, in the individual, issue into some special forms of consciousness of a substantial vital fact, or it may keep the mystic rigorously to a diet of dry faith. What is essential to it, that is, to Catholicism truly understood, is the implanting and fostering in the human soul of a life strictly super-human. The life of a bird is not more other than that of a stone, than is that of the peasant who possesses this super-human life, higher than that of the sage, artist, or scientist, who does not. The difference is essential, not quantitative. "Science," says Coventry Patmore somewhere, "is a line : art, a superficies : life, that is, the knowledge of God, is a solid."

Now the whole history of Robert Hugh Benson is a determined working at and with this notion and this fact. Artist, symbolist, idealist he may have been. Here, that counts for little. Far beneath them all, alchemising and unifying them all, he was the quintessential Catholic who asks so to be wedded to God in the roots of his nature that—to use that poor human language Christ deigned to use, he with his God may become *one thing*. Through the vine-stock, as I must repeat, and its branches one sap circulates ; through the limbs, one blood ; the soul and her spouse are one with a union of which human marriage is the truest yet most pale of images.

In his lecture on Catholic Mysticism, then, Father Benson says he wishes to indicate its relation to "dogmatism," and to show that the Church has always recognised them as "correlatives rather than irreconcilables" : and to create a kind of "ready reckoner" for the "determination of a mystic's position among his fellows."

Each man, Father Benson reminds us, using a theme which never fails to interest him, has his own view of

everything: stockbroker, poet, soldier, priest, see the same thing, war for instance, differently. So geologist, farmer, poet see, each from his point of view, a meadow. Each, often, sneers at the other's *interpretation* of what he sees. Only God exhausts the full possible knowledge of any object. All religion contemplates an interpenetrating yet transcendent spirit-world, but insufficiently, superstitiously, or rightly. To the vulgar and the refined were presented, in old times, an exoteric and an esoteric form of religion respectively. So with the Greeks; so with the Egyptians. Popular cult was tolerated to the many: to the few, inner meanings were presented, discernible by a special instruction or illumination. Even in Judaism, the Priest imposed the Law, and the Prophet revealed its inner soul. Christianity fully explained to the human soul those instincts which had set it travailing and groaning towards a birth of it knew not really what. But, what has been explained, is no more mysterious. If, then, Christianity is “revelation,” are not all veils removed? What possible “mysticism” is left to a believing Christian?

Much. Even Christianity admits of points of view. The dogmatic theologian traces the superb coherence of its contents. “Orderliness” is his objective. By the quick instinct of love, the same contents are approached by the unreasoning “devout.” But beside the man of thought and the man of prayer, “stands the Mystic, the artist of the spiritual life, as hard to define as the poet or the musician.” Each of these three classes reaches the same divine Substance, one by understanding, one by love, and one by sight. Yet each of them, again, for success even in their own line, must share the processes of the other two. But, once obedient to creed, and purified by prayer, the Mystic can trust himself, uniquely, to his gift of Intuition.

Now there are *schools* of Mysticism. These are on the whole differentiated by their following either the Immanentist or the Transcendentalist line. Each has its danger. To concentrate upon God's Immanence leads almost equally to Pantheism or Materialism ; to fling wide one's vision after an utterly transcendent God, reintroduces sooner or later that Gnosticism which cleaves an unbridged chasm between God and all things else. Christianity bridges the gulf : "maketh the two things one ;" abates not one jot of the proclamation : God is a Spirit ; yet asserts, The Word was made Flesh. All Christians hold fast to this double truth ; but usually their human minds possess affinities with one rather than the other of its parts. God has expressed profound Truths about Himself in terms of space and time ; rightly, therefore, may mystics seek Him in terms of these. To this Immanentist school would thus belong St. Teresa, Dame Juliana of Norwich, von Eckhartshausen, and St. Francis de Sales. Supreme among Transcendentalists must of course be placed St. John of the Cross. Through his triple night of renounced sense, imagination, thought, and even divine communication, he passes out into the garden where the Beloved waits. Him the Quietists caricature ; him too, our moderns who vaunt themselves "above" all creed and code.

Now since Mystics are, it is patent, individualists, they, if any, need a guide, and sign-posts to their *via media*. Thus Christian Scientists "can see nothing but transcendence" ; the "New Theology," "nothing but immanence." Alone the Catholic Church, issuing from and continuing the Incarnation, and reaching souls not least through Sacraments, keeps a firm hold on either truth, and ministers wisely to the daily life of prayer and behaviour, to the ranging speculations of the intellect, and to the intuitional flights of the soul.



Benson, however, was never really at his ease in an abstract world, though the logical side of him enjoyed concatenating facts and propositions. It is in his novels that he incarnates his theories.

I find the theory to be made visible in a highly simplified form, and by the help (as usual) of violent contrasts, in the book *None Other Gods*. Closely allied to it is *The Conventionalists*, especially as in both these books the supreme contrast between the infinitely valuable supernatural life and the *relatively* negligible natural qualities and career is concentrated in a single person, and involves the rejection of the latter. Closely, too, with Frank Guiseley and Algy Bannister goes Mr. Main, of *An Average Man*, who loses everything for Christ in exact proportion as Percy Brandreth-Smith is letting go of Christ in order to grip the world. On a more general scale, the contrast between the Supernatural and the relatively worthless natural was emphasized, as I said, in the “mediaevalised” Rome in *The Lord of the World*. Absolutely speaking, as I there too said, the positive depreciation of the natural is a literary artifice intended to bring out the unique value of supernature; because *this* is good, *that* is not bad; only, so good is the supreme good that the rest can well be lost for its sake, nay, counted, as St. Paul accounted it, as dung, compared to the transcendent knowledge and love of his Lord.

Frank Guiseley was a Cambridge undergraduate, who added to a long list of eccentricities the crowning freak of becoming a Catholic. Frank, while still at Eton, had dressed King Henry VI's bronze statue in a surplice, himself dispensing with a shirt. At Cambridge he fluttered the town by visiting it as a German Prince, and shocked the Great Court, at Trinity, by smoking in it as a Nun. A

junior Dean he drove to desperation by causing brown-paper parcels of bread and butter, labelled with his address, to be left all over Cambridge, and so to be transported, as an endless stream of lost property, to the poor man's residence. Clearly, then, he was endowed with a fantastic measure of that *esprit* which after all is not so wholly unallied to what is "spiritual." Some spiritual upheaval in him therefore—we are not told and simply cannot guess what was its nature—was responsible for his "conversion," and again drove him to "take to the roads" after his renunciation by his father, old Lord Talgarth. Off, then, went Frank, trusting that Jennie Launton, the Rector's daughter at Merefield, his father's village, would trust him even through this escapade. This indeed she at first proposed to do, certain that she could soon enough reduce her *fiancé* to common-sense. All that Jennie did was the very apotheosis of common-sense. In fact, it was she who took in hand the whole situation, which included Lord Talgarth, Archie Merefield, Frank's elder brother, and Dick Guiseley, his cousin. A very near future was foreseen, in which Frank, having apologised and done brief penance, should find his allowance restored, and with it, Jennie.

Meanwhile Frank tramped and did tramps' work and ate tramps' food, and enormously increased his experience of life amid the crippling humiliations of vagrancy. Religion? Well—he was happy, and a thrill came upon him, new and indescribable, when, at Mass, he saw a vested priest mount to the altar. . . . Meanwhile he fell in with the most hateful personage to whom Benson ever introduces us, "Major Trustcott," as he willed to be called, cad to his soul's marrow, tramping with a companion, Gertie, who passed, for convention's sake, as his wife. The days go by: Gertie confides in Frank, different in grain (she

blindly feels) from the Major whom, however, she still thinks she loves. The spell of Sunday evening evokes her hidden soul : pitiful as such a soul may be, yet it is worth the saving—*must* be saved, as Frank gradually realises. Parallel with this conviction, this *vocation*, comes the ghastly temptation that religion is meaningless. That at least had seemed solid, in the hour when his tramp, with all it meant of abandonment and undertaking, was revealed a fantastic freak. What sort of conceivably adequate proof was there of all that? . . . How in the world could his little concrete prayers alter eternal issues? . . . All the foundations of his spiritual world tottered and seemed withdrawn. . . . At least Jennie might be trusted. . . . Yet *might* she? was her love really his? was human love a reality, anywhere and at all? . . . He yielded with all his sensitive self. He knew now where Reality was! All this, that he hated so, was the real : the Major, the sordid lodging-house, the gross facts of material life. Spirit and Matter stood acutely differentiated, as illusion and reality, this side and that. Yet somewhere within him, something had not yielded. His will set its teeth; an extraordinary psychic obstinacy reflected itself even in his exterior behaviour : he held on, and in a moment came a beginning of reward.

The austere mystery of dawn taught him his first lesson. Into a wood and over park-land he walked in the un-gathered light, all things being silent round him. No leaf stirred, no bird nor insect cried; hundreds of rabbits, awake and motionless on the dewy grass, eyed him unafraid.

It was the solemnity then that impressed him most—solemnity and an air of expectation. Yet it was not mere expectation. There was a suggestion of the fundamental

and the normal, as if perhaps movement and sound were, after all, no better than interruption ; as if this fixed poise of nature were something complete in itself ; as if these trees hung out their leaves to listen to something that they could actually hear, as if these motionless creatures of the woodland were looking upon something that they could actually see ; as if there were some great secret actually present and displayed in dead silence and invisibility before those only who possessed the senses necessary to perceive it.

This crisis, therefore, presented him once more with matter and spirit in vehement opposition, as unreal and real ; only this time it was matter which was the illusion. Frank dated from this dawn a radiant re-interpretation of all his instincts and behaviour so far ; a real "transmutation of all values" : what he had thought were surely right—his hatreds ; his kindnesses ; his renunciations—he saw more and more to be temperamental, due to education, due to whim. . . . Husk after husk of selfishness began to fall away.

The Major steals a tin from a child : Frank shoulders the blame and is put into prison. It was one more madness : the ignominy goes beyond what he feels he can bear : once more, religion and Jennie's love, his two fixed stars, vacillate and are eclipsed, in the sordid night of his soul. After his discharge, snubbed by officials ; warned, after a slum-fight, by the police ; cold-shouldered even by a priest ; turned out of his very work by the police again at York, he feels "rolled in the dirt" ; he is crumbling away, all round his soul : only the tiniest hard lump remains unbroken at its innermost. . . . But the blow which breaks it falls. Jack Kirby, Frank's one great friend, had been commissioned to tell Jennie of the prison episode. . . . Jennie, with the serenest sense, to be

applauded by all right-thinking persons, broke off the engagement.

“Honestly,” Frank wrote later on to Dom Hildebrand Maple, “I don’t quite know what I was doing for the next week or so. Simply everything was altered . . . the only thing I wanted was to get away, and get down somewhere into myself and hide. . . . I seemed as if I was ill, and could only lie still and watch and be in hell. . . . I honestly did not feel any resentment whatever against either God or Jennie. It was frightful, but it was true, and I just had to be still inside and look at it.”

Here then is accomplished the first of the three great stages of the mystical ascent. The soul is detached utterly from the idolatries of all that is not God. The Purgation is complete. It will no longer try to live by that human life as though that were the all. The question is, will it be content to learn to live by the *supernatural* life, which has thus torturingly thrust itself into the unaccustomed organism of the soul, like blood into a long paralysed limb, or thought into a long unthinking brain? Around him the other lives go on; Jack Kirby’s, whom Frank visits, and leaves for Gertie’s sake and the Major’s; Jennie’s, who sees that common-sense has all but decided she must marry Dick Guiseley, who has proposed to her. . . . The life, that is, of honest human affection, and the life of adamantine selfishness. The life too of the intellect—chaste and as self-sacrificing, for its ideal, as any monk’s; for Frank has to be taken now to Dr. Whitty’s, the specialist in toxins, for a poisoned foot which threatens tetanus and disaster. But so fiercely is the divine life already burning within Frank that the materialist doctor and his servant become conscious of it: the room where Frank lies is transfigured; his delirium is inspired; himself he becomes somehow significant,—terribly, for the servant’s grosser sense; compellingly,

yet sweetly, for the doctor whose whole-hearted intellectualism is so pure as to be all but spiritual. Leaving the specialist's, whose name will lovingly recur to him at the very end of all, Frank and his companions find themselves guests at a great Benedictine monastery. In the dark church after supper, the Community pray, and, later on again, sing the Matins of the Dead ; for it was All Souls' Eve. On to Frank's soul fell softly the Benedictine peace : this was a home-coming ; the sane calm of the house and church and monks met and was welcomed by the interior peace that now was beginning to be his, completing and bettering it, "smoothing Distortion down till every nerve found soothing." But for all that, the Benedictine vocation, he knew, was not for him. True, in that monastery too he had one of his profoundest visions into the hidden world, and *saw* the enormous need and suffering of the souls in purgatory, and of the power of prayer to help them. . . . But for many days now, he had been *seeing*. . . . He had abandoned the practice of his earlier days of conversion, when he was still his own centre, even in his efforts after holiness. Now that God was the centre of all his life,—it flowing from Him, rather than setting, tide-like, towards Him,—all that he had believed because God told him it was true, had now "come up" to him and "turned itself inside out," he wrote, wrestling pathetically to describe what could not even, adequately, be conceived. He saw these mysteries somehow from the inside ; somehow, by *being* them . . . in a flash ; "in a point," Juliana of Norwich used to say. Henceforward he always could see : the Supernatural never found itself betrayed by veiling Nature ; the one came in and with the other, like soul in body. It is now that he heard the ecstatic music I have spoken of above ; and now that he meets those tramps in the stable who *are*, he knows, but

knows not why he knows, the Holy Family, and *how* they are he knows not. The way of Union has begun ; his happiness is complete. The Dark Night is all about him ; but it has grown brighter than the day ; the light shines in his heart ; he moves forth fearlessly ; everywhere, in the breezes of the garden, beneath the cedars and among the lilies, his Beloved meets him.

The story runs rapidly to its close. In London, the tramps find their way to Hackney. To their lodging-house comes the Rev. Parham-Carter, an old Etonian contemporary, and now curate at the Eton Mission. Frank is forced to reveal himself, if only to obtain outside help for the rescue of Gertie, now definitely in love with him, and restive in all manner of feminine ways. The Major too suspects Frank's purpose, and horrible thoughts begin to germ in his drink-maddened brain. Parham-Carter, a conscientious and philanthropical young man, grinds back his shocked amaze, and is ready to help Gertie, but above all, Frank, in whatever ways his scheme of Christian endeavour supply to him. In a sociable moment, even, he points out to Frank a newspaper announcement of the engagement of Jennie Launton to Lord Talgarth. Frank takes the news quite simply ; not hardly ; just, *as God sees it*. Almost at once,—and this too he will learn, casually and serenely,—Talgarth and Lord Merefield are killed in a motor smash ; the Earldom reaches Frank. . . . But meanwhile he has been successful, he has taken Gertie to her home ; and on Christmas Eve he visits for a moment Westminster Cathedral. The crib was not yet unveiled, but a priest saw him kneeling there, and saw his face. . . . God was looking through it ; a moment since, in that Poor Man's face it had been just its “extraordinary serenity and peace” which thrilled the priest : now, it was the divine which “stabbed

the watcher's heart clean through with one overwhelming pang." Frank returns to the squalid lodging-house in Hackney Wick ; he meets the clergyman and Dick Guiseley and Jack Kirby, but rebuffs them, gently . . . he must finish the work he has to do ; he will see them later on, perhaps. The Major comes back too ; he knows about Gertie, and has drunk to frenzy. The failure is soon completed : Frank lies dying, his skull, his whole body, shattered by the madman's kicks. Yet somehow, within this dying man, lapsing so swiftly into nothingness, everything seemed contained.

It seemed to Parham-Carter as he came into the room as if he had stepped clean out of one world into another. And the sense of it was so sudden and abrupt that he stood for an instant on the threshold amazed at the transition.

First, it was the absolute stillness and motionlessness of the room that impressed him, so far as any one element predominated. There were persons in the room, but they were as statues.

He came forward and kneeled too by the bed.

Then, little by little, he began, in that living stillness, to understand rather better what it was that he was witnessing. . . . It was not that there was anything physical in the room, beyond the things of which his senses told him. . . . But that the physical was not the plane in which these five persons were now chiefly conscious was the most evident thing of all. . . . There was about them, not a Presence, not an air, not a sweetness or a sound, and yet it is by such negatives only that the thing can be expressed.

And so they kneeled and waited. . . .

A cock crew, thin and shrill, somewhere far away ; a dray rumbled past the end of the street and was silent.

But the silence in the room was of a different quality ; or, rather, the world seemed silent because this room was so, and not the other way. It was here that the centre lay, where a battered man was dying, and from this centre radiated out the Great Peace.



Frank seemed to be looking, as in a kind of meditation, at nothing in particular. It was as a man who waits at his ease for some pleasant little event that will unroll by and by. He was in no ecstasy, and, it seemed, in no pain and in no fierce expectation; he was simply at his ease and waiting. He was content, whatever those others might be.

For a moment it crossed the young clergyman's mind that he ought to pray aloud, but the thing was dismissed instantly. It seemed to him impertinent nonsense. That was not what was required. It was his business to watch, not to act.

So, little by little, he ceased to think actively, he ceased to consider this and that . . . and the peace grew within and without, till the balance of pressure was equalised and his attention floated at the perfect poise.

Again there was no symbol or analogy that presented itself. It was not even by negation that he thought. There was just one positive element that included all: time seemed to mean nothing, the ticks of the clock with the painted face were scarcely consecutive; it was all one, and distance was nothing, nor nearness—not even the nearness of the dying face against the pillows. . . .

It was so, then, that something of that state to which Frank had passed communicated itself to at least one of those who saw him die.

I confess that I am disinclined to discuss, from any literary point of view, this book which Hugh felt to convey, better than any other, his message. The ordinary faults are there, I suppose, though I am glad always to have felt, with him, that here the faults were at their fewest and the dramatic power higher than in his other modern novels. Nor do I wish to discuss its genesis. More than one model served for Frank Guiseley; the chief, a “Holy-Spirit man,” as I have heard him called, has passed, like Frank, though by no bloodstained door, into that spiritual world with which he felt himself akin. Lovable he was; but the spirit is not always like “waters going softly”: it is fire and wind, and can scorch and buffet those who

encounter it ; and can violently treat, too, the body and brain and soul which are not yet fully responsive to its impetus. Thus of those whom he encountered many found him wayward, unaccountable, gusty in mood, frankly an undesirable. After, then, a life harsh upon the whole with the passionate homage it received and its recurrent loneliness, may he repose *in loco viridi*.

Nor do I think it of use to insist upon the many rather obvious criticisms which were hurled at the book. "The whole story is utterly pointless." That was one which filled Hugh Benson with glee. He honestly loved to see people playing true to their character. And he was convinced, beyond all else, that most people did not even begin to suspect what essential Catholicism meant and claimed to do. It was not that they thought it wrong, but did not even guess what it was. So a story about it was like hanging clothes upon a vacuum. "Gertie was not worth saving." That, on the other hand, was one which filled him with a kind of terror and indignation. However feeble, ungrateful, unpromising a soul might be, it was always a soul : always infinite in its connotations. . . . But, as I said, not even he could always take that attitude in practice. I will quote from a single letter, written to a young Jesuit, in which his answers make it abundantly clear what questions had been asked him, and reveal his opinion upon certain important elements in the book.

1. Certainly Frank and Algy are both "simplified," because it would be impossible *in a novel* to do more than show the general line, and the *sort* of things that follow one another in regular sequence.

2. Sensitivism to God and to Nature are not *ultimately* at variance ; though there are certain stages and periods where they are. Our Lord fasts in the wilderness ; but

eats fish and honeycomb after the Resurrection. The complexities come in "the wilderness."

3. No two paths are exactly the same ; and I think we all do a lot of harm by trying to insist that our friend should walk in exactly the same path with ourselves. Certainly the main features and the landscape are the same, and these are common to all. But I don't see how one can communicate exactly one's own experience to anyone else. There is "a white stone given on which is written a name which no one knows except he to whom it is given." . . . That stands, it seems to me, for the incommunicable experience. But the "white garments" of the redeemed are given to all alike.

4. Dr. Whitty and Frank had one thing in common—absolute honesty and devotion. That is, subjectively they stood side by side. And therefore were deep in their sympathy. But they looked at entirely different sides of things ; and, *objectively*, had practically nothing in common. Privately, I believe that Dr. Whitty will have grace on his deathbed ! . . . But I wanted to draw him merely as he was just then ; and to hint that we are advanced a long way if we are really honest—even though in other ways we are exceedingly blind or stupid.

5. Yes : there isn't *at present* any language in which Dr. Whitty and Frank can talk. But I think there are far-away signs that there will be, some day. At present one must comfort one's self with remembering that God *MUST*—because He is God—reward *absolute* sincerity : and somehow reveal necessary truths to such a man, in time. . . .

6. I am *absolutely certain* (personally) that there is not this divergence between "the two peaks."<sup>1</sup> If you cross your 1st and 2nd finger and rub your nose, you could swear you had two noses. . . . We have often got to *deal* with them as two, I agree.

7. I don't think I could follow up Dr. Whitty. . . . I think the processes necessary to bring him objectively right are *essentially* divine secrets. I don't think a character so fixed could *manifest* the change. And people would merely say if one attempted to describe it—How very convenient.

<sup>1</sup> The standpoints of science and faith.

For myself, I would ask no more than whether, in this book, Benson has successfully achieved what he intended. And this was not, to argue that a Gertie is worth saving at any price, even one's own life : that to become a tramp, or give up Cambridge or an Earldom or a Jennie, are good methods of self-sanctification ; that a monk's life is better than a scientist's and a scientist's than a squire's ; but that there is a life in essence more real and more alive than that of common-sense, of intellect, even of religious virtue ; and that though, ideally, within the supernaturalised man there should exist a perfect harmony of all his parts, yet even if, in the creation of that harmony (which shall be realised at any rate in an eternal world), inferior parts are for the while to be immolated, that matters not one whit. "The Failure was complete," he says of Frank ; and again, "There is no such thing as Failure." And this philosophy it was here his business to present *incarnate*, made visible and tangible in living persons, almost (dare I say ?) as the Ineffable, which can be the theme of Text-books, and expressed in creed or morals, and has indeed been spoken, through the ages, "in many fragments and in many fashions," was, by a supreme decree, best uttered "in a Son." Is Benson to be blamed for having aimed at offering to us what could at most be but images and shadows ? Mathematicians work with notions that defy—sense, of course ; imagination, of course ; even, so to say, ideas : for them, parallel straight lines meet at infinity, and the like : on the "fourth dimension" whole books are written, with coloured diagrams. . . . Poets and lovers by strange outcries, gestures, and symbols, stammer forth, and cannot help themselves, the ineffable splendours that intoxicate them. And no one has ever taught the mystic always to keep silence. Since, then, Monsignor Benson *had* to

speaking, upon this theme and in this medium, could he have done better than here he has? I doubt it. He has at least spoken bravely: somewhere his words are bound to find an echo.

Hugh Benson's own "mystical life" was, therefore, spent in preserving and developing a supernatural element within him. To do this, he had, like any other man, to avoid its destruction by sin, and to foster it by self-discipline, by service, the use of the Sacraments, and prayer. I need say no more of the purifying pain which insinuated itself into every recess of his soul, nor of the utterly self-sacrificing service which he exacted of himself. It has been seen how the sacraments were an integral part of his life: so much so, that his whole interpretation of the universe was in sacramental terms. Less massively perhaps has his devotion to that great mystery, which is Mary, shown itself; still, it was there, and at the roots of all his spiritual life. When he was at his simplest and happiest, he was most able to speak of her and to her; and the whole Marian element in him, if I dare call it so, belonged to the most "evangelical" and least academic and argumentative part of his life. She "came natural" to him: "Oh," he cried, after preaching about her, "why *will* not people understand?" Yet I will add just this: until his visit to Lourdes, the *clothes* of his childlike devotion to her were, like his favourite formulæ for prayer, those of a *period*, and historical. She was, if you will, the Queen and Mother of English devotion; sometimes, indeed, she was shown as the "little maid" whom Juliana of Norwich saw; but it was not till the last years, on the whole, that Hugh's piety began to lose its somewhat Tudor colouring and to put on a more universal, timeless air. But I will not labour this.

It is, however, in his prayer that his "mystical" life is more immediately to be watched.

Hugh Benson dealt with his own soul in a straightforward way, explaining himself to himself, when (in moments of depression, for example) he needed explanation, by his theory of the spiritual, the intellectual or reasoning, and the imaginative "parts" or rather modes of action, or of consciousness, of the soul. The "spiritual" part, with the special mode of consciousness corresponding to all that was ultimate in the different parts of the universe and therefore behind all reasoning, and also to God, he described as dwelling in the inner or lower (he did not mean by this, need I recall, *less excellent*; quite the contrary) or subconscious self; "reasoning reason" was in the upper, outer, less valuable part, and would lapse when the whole man was made perfect; imagination, as far as I can understand him, involved both, and consisted in an unreasoned uprush of the subconscious immediately clothing itself in the images already stocked in the brain, and supplied by sense-experience. His psychic processes, he held, like any man's, involved now one, now another, of these "parts," singly, or two by two, or all three together. It will be noticed that in all this no mention is yet made of the supernatural, as such.

A very few pages of spiritual diary—the first nine or ten of a thick volume, empty else—survive, from which I shall quote. He never kept up these diaries (which he always began with a certain pomp and preface), less, I imagine, from weakness of purpose than because a man in his heart must always feel that a personal diary is something of a luxury, and that to give time to it is, when you regard all your time as vowed to the service of your neighbour, some sort of robbing of the altar. I will quote first a paragraph

or two in which you will see his method of dealing with his soul when the imaginative side was for the moment predominantly active :

Now that I am making a fresh start, I propose to write down now and then any thoughts that come to me in prayer, that I may remember, consider, and use them.

This particular occasion of beginning rises from two such thoughts that I had this morning.

(1) During my thanksgiving after mass I was very cold and completely in the dark, as indeed I had been ever since midday yesterday. At the very end of my thanksgiving (which was wretched) I had an absolutely clear mental vision, which came without any perceptible train of thought. There was a stream covered with a yellow scum of foam and sticks. This was my soul. My consciousness, I became aware, was struggling to see God ; every struggle plunged me deeper into the blinding stinking mess, because I was trying to get *out* of myself. The scum, I perceived, was the result of [the] violent mental and imaginative activity of my life here, my writing, interviews, and restlessness. Then I understood in a flash that I must sink into God. I did so, and immediately found myself in clear brown water full of lights and gleams. This corresponded to some extent with my prayers last night. When I tried to aspire I became blind and exhausted. Then the thought “GOD” came, and instantly I was at peace.

First, then, the familiar imagery in which the original psychic state spontaneously clothed itself is carried on, so that even where the unsatisfactory mood of the will is altered into a better one, a pictorially suitable modification of the image is created. The clear water underneath replaces the turbid surface. The night before there had been a brain so tired that it could not even create images. It just strained itself forward, and to this side and to that, blindly. The simple and familiar thought of “God,” taking shape in it, steadied it, so to say, provided it with a motionless and dark object to gaze at, stilled this speculative intellect and

created peace. It was in the consequent calm that the subconscious could unfatiguingly shine upwards and create images on the surface.

At times, however, the intellect was of value.

At the very end of my meditation this morning (which was a poor one, because of previous struggle and activity) I looked at the tabernacle : and in an instant came the question "How is *that* conceivable?" Instantly came an intellectual thought which gradually developed.

Love is a pure and ethereal thing. [But in nature the climax of love is physical.] Yet in that very instant the soul, for example, of an exquisite artist comes into being. So the Love of God expresses itself first in the Incarnation in a physical form. So in the Blessed Sacrament a carnal priest says HOC . . . CORPUS MEUM, and in that instant Christ strikes Himself into matter.

That is, the notion with which he was never tired of working, the *sacramentality* of things, presented itself disengaged from distractingly allied notions, and filled him with its light. Most of what remains of these short notes consists of the construction of a sacramental ladder towards God, starting from the lowest and, by an ever increasing spiritualisation of its structure, reaching to the divine Essence. Thus from unintelligent matter, the soul proceeds to life, thence to self-conscious life, and then to the life which contemplates God. Herein, too, is a further distinction. The less favoured soul contemplates God as He is in action, not yet in himself.

"Years ago," he parenthetically states, "I dreamt that I was in heaven, and was taught the language of heaven, and my first lesson was that the movement which meant God-as-He-is, was absolutely different from the movement which meant God-as-He-issues-into-act."

The Incarnation is a concession to this. Its "whole religious system is just a codification of methods of con-



templating God in action. . . . Creeds tell us little more than this.” Even in heaven, where the Blessed contemplate Him as He is, yet one more clearly than another, are there not veils, somehow, interposed between His Reality and their vision? The veil, at least, of their finitude. . . .

He briefly speaks of that reaching up to God by the “negative” way—“He is not this, nor that . . .” Indeed, for the human thought which says, He is “*this*”—for example, Power, He appears, for the moment, to be *not* “that”—for instance, Love. God then is found to be, for thought, apparent Emptiness. Above all, the soul, in such a state says nothing. Yet God not only is, but acts; hence in every mode of being which is dependent upon Him, He may be contemplated; and supremely, in Jesus Christ. In Him, is the completed Utterance of God. Thus every utterance, in whatever measure it expresses God, is as it were a shadow, an outline, a piteous pathetic effort towards the Creation of a Christ, whom all men, without knowing it, desire. In Krishna, in the Greek Gods, Benson seems to himself to find “Christ expressing Himself through men’s ideas, and fashioning a distorted phantom and body of thought—(for they had no historical existence). In Buddha I see more—I see the Word approaching very near to a human personality. But in Jesus Christ He is actually present.”

Wherefore a Christian will be living his life as he should, even if he confine his entire spiritual preoccupation to the Mass. The Mass *is* Christ. The Eucharist is *the* Sacrament. Better still, the Church—for the Church involves Christ, even as He does, Christians—is in a certain sense the best because the completest Manifestation of God and consummation, or *pleroma*, of Jesus Christ Himself. Once admit, he keeps repeating, the Incarnation,

and the whole Catholic system of Church and priest and Pope, Mary and Sacraments, ritual and sacramentals, follows necessarily. This ground is too familiar for us to cover again. But this was the manner of topic which he worked out with subtlety and delight when in his prayer the intellect was at its most active.

At times, however, he would say that the spiritual essence of his soul had been allowed by God into direct communion with the divine ; had experienced what can be mystically called a "touch" of God, and of which the many species are to be found catalogued in any book on Mystical Prayer, such as Father Poulain's and Father Tissot's, and, after a different method, in Miss Evelyn Underhill's large volume. The difficulty in writing of this is, of course, that ideas and images belonging to the other parts of psychic experience are the only medium in which to convey what one wishes to convey : but ideas and images are precisely what are excluded from direct mystical experience even of the simpler sort. Of "technically" mystical experiences, as of "contemplation," there is perhaps no sort of evidence that Monsignor Benson ever had any.

I have been reading *Lex Orandi*.<sup>1</sup> It is wonderful. It gave me a sense of God, such as, I think, I have never experienced before. Always, I think, I have thought more of His Immanence than Transcendence : but the argument of the Receding Ideal suddenly broke open His Transcendence. For twenty-four hours I was intoxicated with joy. The Catholic Faith, from God to holy water, suddenly moved and glowed. I wished to buttonhole strangers, and explain. Now, of course, the glow has died, but it is all there. I realise that God is Creator and I a creature ; and

<sup>1</sup> I may repeat that the problems of Modernism, of which the elements are to be found in this book, simply did not trouble Benson's attention. All Modernism was, in his case, defeated beforehand by his primary devotion to Authority. He fed his soul on the beauty and piety of *Lex Orandi* and did not speculate.

that therefore the ladder between us—or rather the modes of our communication—must be infinitely mysterious.

This comes as a crown upon my recent considerations of the three worlds in which we live—physical, mental, spiritual. Each full communication from God must partake of these. For example, the Blessed Sacrament is physical in its accidents, mental in its doctrine, spiritual in its effects and inmost nature. Meditation must be physical in its appliances—it needs a still body, and place : mental in its processes, spiritual in its fruit and action. And all this because we are all three, and need gifts that smite down through the three strata. We climb through them, up ; God strikes down.

Practically, then, one must recognise that at times one is under the dominion of one more than the other. After lunch I am physical ; the process asserts itself ; I cannot aspire. While writing, I am mental, the body suffers, and the spirit. Now I perfectly and gratefully understand that I have been writing too much. I have slightly warped both body and spirit in the service of mind and imagination. I propose now to cure this, if God will—I shall take care of health ; I shall meditate more intently. This, I hope, will restore the balance. At Mirfield I strained the spirit—I despised mental and physical exercises. The result was scrupulousness and misery.

I propose to be saner now. And when I get properly balanced again, I shall write again. The three must be developed. Certainly the physical needs discipline ; and it shall get it—I will not become a health fanatic—and writing needs it too. For the present I shall exercise spirit first and foremost ; next I shall attend to the body—and finally, I shall do my best to drive the three in a sensible team.

Naturally, in no man’s soul can divisions between “parts” be made as by a hatchet ; nor, perhaps, can any psychic experience be confined wholly to any one part, or mode of consciousness. Currents may pass over that ceaselessly moving sea, winds ruffle its surface, clouds reflect themselves upon it ; but there is a continuous shifting of all that is in it, and nothing is quite still there, at

any depth, for a moment. Still, at a given hour, this predominates over that; and, in general, certain main tendencies hold good. In Hugh Benson's ordinary life, and even, I think, his ordinary prayer, the visualising imagination played a very high part indeed. At moments of fatigue and of high cerebral activity, the logical "faculty" was what he relied upon or submitted to; so much so, that he was often rebuked, especially at certain crises in his life, for forgetting that there were higher methods of laying hold upon the truth than logic. This he would grant, but yet would not deny that logic was *a* way of reaching true results, and that as far as it went, so far you too might go, indeed, must go, unless you implicitly abandoned human reasoning as a valid process altogether. Frankly, in higher religious matters Hugh esteemed logic less than he did other psychic processes; he had recourse to it, as I have said, when his more spiritual powers were somehow numbed, as in all the history of his entering the Church: he also enjoyed, as a somewhat second-rate entertainment, its neatness, its inevitability, its compactness, rather as a true artist might yet enjoy the delicious finality of heraldry, with its five tinctures, two metals, its furs, its "charges" with their uncompromising shapes. At any rate, logic ought always to be there, subjacent, as melody should be, in music, even if you do not like a tune. In consequence, where he was clear about his premisses, he held that you could use logic fearlessly; where he could not fully see the logic of an argument, or the argument justifying a position he felt he should adopt, he regretted it, and tried to supply it. Never at any time did he fail to deny that the logic of the reasoning reason was in essence unable to deal with the higher element of the spirit. But to enter the Church, for instance, a visible entity, was a

practical concern ; logic was well capable of dealing with that, even without spiritual reinforcement, as far as just intellect was concerned. All this side in him, then, especially his prancing delight in what he considered a “knock-out syllogism,” exasperated all those who considered that religion was entirely an affair of “conscience,” that is, of inner impulse, or of a peculiar emotion, or of a “religious sense” as unaccountable to reason as an artist’s joy in colour or a mother’s love.

Yet far was he from governing all, or most of his life, or indeed his deeper life by conscious logic. Indeed, he lived, for the greater part, aloof from the most triumphant exhibition of logic the world has ever seen, that is, Catholic scholastic philosophy and theology. He assured a friend, moreover, that he had never yet succeeded in accomplishing the whole of St. Ignatius’s Exercises, which he regarded as a strictly “reasoned” and deductive manual of ascetic choice, and stated his conviction that no Jesuit could ever be a contemplative. “No,” he repeated, shaking his head, “I really don’t see how he possibly *can*.” He did not, for that, fail to recognise that the *Exercises* also set the soul opposite to Christ and committed it to His following. The description of the *Exercises* in *By What Authority* proves that. Moreover, Benson had worked through the *Exercises* very completely before he became a Catholic.

Equally annoying to all who demanded that religion, like everything else, should in all its parts be matter of objective historical, or of “scientific” proof, was his reliance on direct experience. Psychologically, he would answer, his direct experience (coincident with that of so many others) of a spiritual faculty, demanding and therefore attaining a correspondingly spiritual object, was as good evidence as any that history or mechanical experiment

could supply ; also, that direct historical evidence pointed to a definite revelation of which part of the content stated that this spiritual goal, road, and traveller did indeed exist. In his happier hours it would be of this that he was conscious. He could suffer himself to be led by the Spirit of God, and so trusted himself to love.<sup>1</sup>

In the spiritual life, therefore, which the Roman Church offered him, and there alone, Hugh Benson was able fully to develop. To understand this you must remember that he started with the postulate that God existed and was revealed by Jesus Christ. If that revelation was to be of any avail, that is, if you were to be *sure* of what He meant or even said, you needed an infallible contemporary interpreter. No one, save the Roman Church, even claimed to be this. In her then he found full liberty and full safety. He was given sufficient premisses for a lifetime of theorising, and he had the added satisfaction of knowing it was all true ; he had full scope for his imagination, for no imagination can possibly stretch further than, or even as far as, Catholic Christianity bids it, and he need never fear henceforward that his dreams might be merely the construction of his own feverish brain. In a thousand ways he was stimulated and governed. And behind it all was the unique spiritual *datum* to which he could respond bravely, with the spiritual part too of himself, knowing now that It was there, and how It willed to be dealt with by human souls. He found, as Mrs. Benson has written to me,

a home where his ceaseless restlessness would be allayed, his tendency to change both allowed and restricted, his

<sup>1</sup> I recall the considerable enthusiasm he displayed in propagating the "devotion" to the Holy Ghost, so dear to Leo XIII and Cardinal Manning. He wrote a preface to the little book sold by Miss Florence Langmore and Mrs. Paxton for the help of the Buntingford and other missions, and looked forward to much spiritualising of prayer by this means.

mind satisfied, and his heart at peace—a Hand always holding him, its pressure felt as protection, not weight. His emotional faith became quieted and strengthened by the nature of the requirements of the whole Roman Catholic system, that it must be a Faith of the Will, not dependent on emotion. . . .

. . . As Hugh said to me when he came home straight from Woodchester, “I feel now I have a rope round my waist, and I can go anywhere.” So, being satisfied as to his intellectual position, he could then live out his full artistic, changeful life in all its fantasticalness and fascination, restlessness becoming variety, and change becoming movement; and the Great Rope gently making him feel it was there, not only as check, but as protection.

I need therefore say, in answer to a singular question I saw somewhere asked, how it was that Hugh was given such scope for his various talents and tendencies in the Roman Catholic Church, no more than it was there, and there only, that his talents and tendencies would ever have come to all that they did. That his ecclesiastical superiors might have been expected to interfere with them is a suggestion which need detain no one; that he himself, elsewhere, would not have felt sure of how to deal with them, and therefore would have proceeded with uncertain step, and worked with faltering touch, and seen with clouded eye, is perfectly beyond dispute.

Of the characteristics of Hugh Benson’s inner life I should therefore venture to say, as briefly as possible, that it was in the first place extremely childlike, or rather boy-like, and simple. I mean this in the sense that he took readily what authority assigned to him, or, if he resisted, he did so on personal and emotional and not intellectual grounds: that, when he argued, he did so with a certain zest in sheer building up of proofs, detection of analogies, working out a not too difficult problem, which supplied

him with the joy of intellectual tussle without the disheartening sense of destined defeat—really, this in him had its very humble parallel in the schoolboy's delight in the mysterious "deductions" of some Sherlock Holmes, of which he knows that sooner or later he will find the explanation; meanwhile he likes pulling the evidence about and turning it inside out on his own account. More constructively, Hugh liked pursuing God's threads through the seeming tangle of creation, till the system became clear to him, as a man may really draw into a masterly unification the apparent chaos of a Wagner opera by the help of some tiny *motif*, first stated, then inverted, expounded, combined, endlessly modified, yet all-elucidating. Perhaps more profound than anything was the instinct which enabled him to regard even religion somehow as a game, a sport. Outrageous as this may sound, I am sure of it; and though, as I said, it was instinctive with him, yet he might have justified himself by scores of passages from the mystics in which they speak of the cosmic process as the Game of God; and even the creative wisdom is described in the mystic theology of the Sapiential books as *ludens coram ipso*, "playing" with the divine Idea, ever more perfectly realised in created modes. The root of all laughter is a certain sense of disproportion; the "harmless ugly" is the ridiculous. A hurtful disproportion may provoke an angry or a bitter laugh; a disproportion between one's hopes and the far better reality, suddenly discovered, may elicit happy laughter; and, when the shock is passed, but the diffused sensation still remains, a contented smile. So he who has found sweetness and truth in the formulæ he uses about God, and the symbols or high sacraments of God, and then suddenly catches sight of the splendours for which they stand, may burst into a joyous laugh: a laugh,



for he sees abruptly how enormously inadequate they are to the Supreme Good which is there behind them ; a joyous laugh, because they already are so good, and promise what is so much better. In moments of this abrupt realisation that “God’s in His heaven,” that of His innumerable images in the world not one, however mean, was altogether a caricature, and that everywhere were means of reaching Him, and an essential “*rightness*,” would the soul but profit by them, Hugh would, literally, break into a laugh, and hug himself, and cry out to friends—“Oh, my dear ; isn’t it all tremendous ? Isn’t it sport ? Isn’t it all huge fun ?”

With, then, this simplicity, directness, and essential fearlessness came a great strength and happiness. I do not refer primarily to that robustness and lack of all moist sentiment which was so characteristic of his temperament, but to his power of “clinging to God,” as he loved to quote from Meredith, “with his strength, not his weakness.” I mean, that many people are conscious of themselves and their instincts mainly as barriers to their salvation, and to be “mortified,” as they say. Their outlook is chiefly negative ; they “must not” do this or that. They regard the world as *hiding* God ; the senses as “ordered towards” what is *not* God, because material. Benson, I know, was happily handicapped in that his true instincts were so sound ; whatever tricks his nerves might play him, he in his soul had nothing of mean dishonesties or lusts. Therefore, being sure that his will was set, in all things, Godward, there was nothing in him or outside of him that he could not take and use ; regarding the world as *holding* God, his powers and instincts as issuing into sacraments of God, his life could be made almost wholly positive ; he could exult, with the St. Francis he so loved, in his brother the sun and his sisters moon and grass and water, nor fear idolatry.

And because he was a Catholic, he knew exactly when and how his will was right ; he knew that to forbid himself what the Church told him to renounce meant no suicide, but simply a withdrawal from what was false, and therefore empty of God, and therefore destructive of the soul. His whole life, then, could be, and was, a happy Godward orientation of the will ; and no one who has the least knowledge of the soul need hesitate to recognise how the greatest happiness, unruffled, unexcited, may coexist with terrible pain, to which the excluded contradictory is merely pleasure. In Benson's spiritual life must therefore be diagnosed simplicity, strength, sincerity, comprehensive and positive activity ; this means, obedience, austerity, self-knowledge and self-discipline, wide sympathy, joyous continuous worship. His faults have shown themselves clearly enough as we went ; they are such as year by year infallibly will have disappeared in proportion as the gaps they made were filled, when they were defects ; and as the distortions, of fine and positive material, which else they were, were rectified. Hugh went essentially from *strength* to *strength*, ever intent upon the contemplation of his God, first in a world become His Holy City, and then, in Himself, beyond all worlds.

## CHAPTER VII

### *IN LOCO PASCUAE*

Sudden as sweet  
Come the expected feet.  
All joy is young, and new all art,  
And He too, whom we have by heart.

ALICE MEYNELL.

IT is difficult to write of Hugh Benson's death, or of what led up to it: for, in a sense, there was no leading up to it, and it found him occupied scarcely otherwise than as in the years I have described. As for the end itself, no one, I think, can add to what his brother has chosen to relate of it; into his death-chamber, as into his chapel, imagination should not enter.

Death, like so many other things, had seemed to Hugh at once dreadful and desirable. He thought of it not too often, but quite deliberately, as a Christian should; and to its double aspect a double mood in him responded. It was the gate of heaven, that "dissolving" which should set him along with Christ: and in this way he came to be in love, like Mary the Queen, with death. But it was, as no one dare deny, a unique and terrible passage; and of the physical act of dying he was, at certain hours, undisguisedly terrified. At Rome, Abbot Raynal and he had cells near together, of which the doors gave upon the great cloistered cortile of Sant' Anselmo. The Abbot's was close to the main entrance; Hugh's just beyond it, so that to leave the cloister he must naturally pass the

Abbot's door. The Abbot died suddenly: Hugh, when he wanted to go out, preferred to journey round almost the four sides of the great quadrangle, sooner than make the transit of those few yards which would lead him past the place where the dead man lay.<sup>1</sup> In the case of his own death, fear focused not so much on the dying as on the possibility of not being dead when he was buried, and already in 1912 he made the strangest provisions in his will.

"I should like," he wrote, "[my] grave to be, if possible, a little brick chamber, accessible from outside, with steps leading down to it, closed by an iron door, which can be opened from the inside; that the coffin should be placed in a loculus in a shelf on one side, which could be forced from within; that the coffin should be lightly made, so that in the event of my being buried alive, I could escape, and that a key should be placed in the coffin. After one month, I should wish all this to be sealed and closed. I wish the requiem to be sung, if possible, by a few boys from Westminster Cathedral, in my own chapel at Hare Street; that I should be laid out in the purple vestments I have set aside for that purpose, and should be carried straight after the requiem to the grave. If all this is impossible, I wish to be buried in Old Hall Cemetery, better, in the chapel corridor there. [He then makes arrangements for annual masses at Westminster and Hare Street.]

4. I beg that the Chapel at Hare Street may be kept so far as is possible in its present arrangements, and used as often as possible for mass, and that the house also, especially the tapestries, may be left as at present. I have given an immense amount of thought and care to all these arrangements.

5. If my arrangements as to my funeral in Hare Street Orchard are impossible, I entreat my executors to make certain of my death by causing an artery to be opened in my arm, in such a way that death would not be caused

<sup>1</sup> Need I say, that had some unselfish action been demanded of him, he would have shrunk from no sacrifice through merely physical fear.

if I were alive (since this would be suicide), but that if life were still in me, the fact would be unmistakable."

It was of course the latter of these devices for ensuring that Hugh should not be buried alive, to which his executors had recourse. At the time of his death, no detail of the former plan had been put in train; to carry it out would have been a lengthy and difficult affair, involving at least a month's delay, and for many reasons quite out of the question. Had Hugh, while his imagination was thus roaming among the shadowy possibilities of death, himself begun to realise his plans, all could, of course, have been ready.

The year 1914 pursued itself, despite Monsignor Benson's already distinct recognition that he felt tired—"not at the top, but deep from inside, don't you know?"—in unremitting toil.

"Alas!" he wrote in July, "impossible to come. Every hour is full up. It is 7 P.M., and I haven't yet said my office or begun to make a sermon for to-morrow, or answered my letters: and every day is like that. I haven't written a word of a novel for six months! Something will break soon and then we shall all be happy!"

Over the waning summer the European war-cloud brooded heavily. Slightly more than two years before the outbreak he had preached, on May 12, 1912, at Westminster Cathedral in connection with the International Peace Congress, on behalf of the Catholic Peace Association. No one in his senses, he had said, would declare war to be the worst of evils. When barbarism or anarchy threatened eternal principles of justice, war might be the one way of escape. But alas, in what modern war, he asked, was it so clear that all the right, and therefore God, was upon one of the two conflicting sides? Ignoble

were our modern wars, and sanctioned only by that mob whose passions, collectively, were singularly other than the will and feeling of the units which composed it. That arbitration might replace war's horrors, was the one subject, perhaps, on which the speakers at the many meetings held that week, in London, could agree. Half in panic, these men, else antagonists, had been driven together by the sight of the profound and general unrest which was bound, should it pursue the course humanly most probable, to plunge not one nation into civil war, but the western world itself into a war such as the world had never yet dreamt of.

It was contemptible to laugh at "peace-meetings"; yet not reasoning alone could realise their ideal. Passion could be conquered only by passion. Humanitarianism was but theory, and futile before facts. Man apart from God was not lovable; in no other way might God and man be known save in that Jesus Christ who, being man, was yet God's perfect image, and God Himself. Yet not to the passionless phantom substituted, in our time, for the fiery figure of Christ, was he calling his hearers, but to the Jesus of the Gospels and the Church.

Wrong, it may be, in his prophecy of the origins the war should have; mistaken, with all England then, as to the course it was bound to follow when it came, he faced up to it with a boy's exhilaration, and with genuine courage (for he suffered horribly from what was happening) and with deep spirituality.

"Honestly," he wrote on September 11, 1914, "I do believe that the war cannot possibly last long. They are tremendous days. I must say that I am glad to be alive."

Another time he draws a map of France, and explains how the falling back upon Paris, which was causing him a

horror-struck bewilderment, must be for the purpose of cutting the enemy's communications, by a force landed behind them in Belgium.

I really believe I understand at last. If that is right the Germans are DONE. There will be a most frightful retreat and slaughter with endless surrenders. But I think that Paris will have to be invested first.

But throughout it was the idea of honour, national and personal, to be safeguarded, which more than mere victories obsessed him. During the horrible days when it seemed possible that England might eternally disgrace herself by standing out, he went miserably to and fro. "Our honour is at stake," he kept repeating. He urged his friends to take commissions, even to enlist. To one who frankly hated the prospect he energetically wrote :

Renounce your will to God with the express contemplation of having to go to be killed. It sounds a brutal thing to say, but I am sure it is the only thing to do. Face it out in its worst aspect : make yourself see it all : and then remember that God and Heaven remain ; and that there is no evil except in being separated from Him.

He did not counsel to others what he was not prepared, as far as might be, to perform. Shrinking with quite singular horror from the idea of going out as military chaplain, he, need I say, did offer to go too, and on his return from Caldey in the autumn, wrote to the same correspondent :

I had a Beastly day. I volunteered : heard nothing. Then suddenly had a wire asking where I was, and whether a letter would find me : and I was *Convinced* it was from the War Office. Well : it was : but it wasn't about that. But for twenty-four hours I was terrified : made my will : wrote letters. But I didn't mind because my will was to go.

Partly, I daresay, this extreme sensitive repugnance was temperamental and would have been felt by him at any past moment of his history : yet it will not be forgotten that at this very time the days of his own life were quickly running out. He must have felt very unequal to exertion—even to the imaginative exertion of throwing off his horror of physical mutilation or pain. But, as I said, he was fully ready to go, and would have proved, one may be sure, courageous, in by far the truest sense, and highly effective, more perhaps, however, among officers than men.

“No,” he wrote to a lady anxious to join, by penitential acts, in the sufferings of her fellow-countrymen, “don’t add a penance. Pray well : *and accept reverses as energetically as victories.*”

And again :

. . . The war is indeed searching us out. But I think it is doing us a lot of good too, spiritually and mentally. We shall be more selfless, I think : and will appreciate liberty more, and so on. People are being very gallant. I lunched at a house last week in town with two boys, each back from the front, each with a right arm in a sling. One gave me a German bayonet he had picked up : [a sketch of the serrated steel follows. This haunted him. It recurs in many letters.] I think the Kaiser must be mad.

A proud and gallant soul therefore was his, as he faced the facts which filled all men’s minds.

For the sake of those on whom the strain of the war was telling heavily, he compiled a small book of prayers, entitled *Vexilla Regis*, which appeared after his death. It was composed chiefly of psalms, of invocations, and of collects, and was arranged in an intercessory scheme according to the days of the week, with special intentions, such as the wounded, prisoners, our enemies, for each day.



There is a certain pathos if we observe that at the very end he returned thus to a system of intercessory prayer closely similar to that of the first book in the production of which he had, at Mirfield, collaborated with Miss Kyle ; while many of the prayers are taken from a still older book which he never cast aside, Bright's *Ancient Collects*, already used by him under Dean Vaughan at Llandaff. Thus did one soul of prayer persist, substantially unaltered, in this variegated life.

And with the summons to prayer, he called, always more insistently, to sacrifice. In the Belgian Relief Number of *Everyman*, appeared a paper written by him, in which the doctrine of sacrifice is the text. In his horror at the enormous crime committed, in the sack of Belgium, against general civilisation, he cannot forget that that very civilisation had been in some measure materialistic. Belgium, then, he felt, might well be the innocent sacrifice for a God-forgetting world, and especially the atonement, before God, for the very existence of an "Upstart Empire, with ten times the brutality of old Rome, and not one tenth of its dignity of human strength." But before the paper could appear, his own sacrifice was consummated, and it was left to Mr. Halliwell Sutcliffe, in the same pages, to deplore the disappearance of the gallant-hearted priest who had held aloft God's torch, unflinchingly, in the dark world's hurricane.

In writing thus I have, of course, anticipated. When he last went to Cambridge, early in August, little of all this was present to his mind. Still, he was depressed ; anxiety rode him heavily, and would not be thrown off : he was harassed by an anonymous threat. Later on, however, his brother saw him at Hare Street ; he was again in high spirits : Hare Street was perfect, he was saying,

and only needed to be left as it was, though this did not prevent him devising and seeking advice for a new rose-garden near the chapel. The brothers dined under the yew trees, and had to their meal a "peculiar and pleasant wine" made from Hugh's own grapes.

Shortly after this he left Hare Street sadly, saying that the leaves would be off the lime trees before he returned.

In mid-September, he went into retreat at Caldey Island. It lasted five days, and his room was next door to the Abbot's. He seemed happy and at peace; he ran daily down to bathe, dressed in grey flannels, towel round neck. He often attended choir; had his meals in the Community refectory, and talked nightly with the Abbot, winding up his stay with a general telling of ghost stories. As a matter of fact his brain was as restless as ever, and, if I dare say so, should have given him—and perhaps gave his friends—far more cause for real anxiety than did his general physical distress. He could not for a moment cease from constructing plots, and working out new novels; even at Mass their ingenious developments would harass him. His anxiety raced onwards, at times into panic. He believed himself the victim of obsession.<sup>1</sup> But I have no duty to relate these moments of extreme humiliation: it is enough to say that the spectre of acute neurasthenia began to haunt him, and to recall, more threatening than ever, the conviction that his collapse would be soon, sudden, and complete. In no better hands than those of the present Abbot of Caldey could he have placed his cure. Even his five days at the monastery worked wonders. He resolved to treat it as a permanent refuge: he meditated the purchase

<sup>1</sup> The last novel-plan he made, dealing with the European War, is in the Appendix, p. 465.

of the little island of St. Margaret, and the building there of a tiny hermitage, where he might live and write and pray, with only the sea-gulls for his company, apart even from the monks, whose home could be reached from St. Margaret's at low tide. Or did he begin to look with hope, at times, towards the Benedictine rule as destined for himself? From Hare Street, not long before, he had written that he believed he had no vocation to be a contemplative. Now he at least began a tentative negotiation with these all but hermit monks. At any rate it was here at Caldey that he foresaw anew the possibility of his Little Gidding—that community dreamt of at Llandaff and Kemsing, half realised at Hare Street, and preconised in the shape of some mystic Garden City, in the *Dublin Review* for April 1910. Even there, you will remember, the Benedictines were to be the spiritual and social heart of that community of artists, craftsmen, students, and ordinary people. On the six or seven hundred acres of Caldey Isle, of which some five hundred are good farm land, he hoped to see, in the concrete, his New Republic. Certainly, beneath its present wise and enterprising government, the island is more likely than ever, I think, was Hare Street, to realise Hugh's Utopia.

He left it happy once again, and sought his brother in Westmorland, among woods and mountains, at the house of some relations, the Marshalls. Hugh went fishing in the lake; and wandered about with a gun; and was eagerly painting in oil colours. His spirits were high: he romped and played childish games with cards. Meanwhile he was confessing to a recurrent breathlessness, which prevented him from walking, such was the pain. Pain, too, in his chest and arms was harassing him. This pain came and went abruptly, and its absence meant bliss.

Once, when it suddenly and entirely left him, up he leapt : "I must go out and finish my sketch," he cried. He smoked less, it is true, and proposed spontaneously to see the family doctor. This he did, and was ordered rest, but was permitted to fulfil immediate engagements.

On October 4, therefore, he is to be found at Salford, and on Monday, the 5th, at Ulverstone, to preach a mission to non-Catholics.

At his own suggestion arrangements had been made to hire the Co-operative Hall for the first night, in order that many, who would scruple to enter a Catholic Church, might have the opportunity of hearing his opening discourse. The following nights, from Tuesday to Friday inclusive, he spoke from the pulpit. He followed the usual method : *i.e.* he first of all answered the questions which had been put by inquirers into the question-box at the church door, and then went on with the actual subject. He gave great attention to the questions, and one night spent about fifty minutes in answering them. The church was crowded every night. In the pulpit he displayed all his usual energy. He did not spare himself in the least, and no one would have guessed that he was not in his usual health. On the Thursday he went to dine with the priests of Barrow-in-Furness. He seemed very tired and rather listless ; and told them that he had been up all night racked with pain, even crying out aloud with the agony of it. He compared the pain to that which one feels when one takes a drink of unexpectedly hot tea. At dinner he was very entertaining. He spoke rapidly as usual, and chuckled in his characteristic way when telling some amusing anecdote. After dinner, Father J. R. Meagher, to whom I am indebted for these reminiscences, took him to the shipyard to see a battleship which was just ready for

sailing. He walked very slowly, and twice was compelled to halt because of the pain.

During the daytime at Ulverstone he saw a number of callers. To one girl who had recently become a Catholic, and who had suffered much opposition from her parents, he recommended the example of St. Perpetua. "We Catholics always win in the end, you know," were his parting words to her. While he was waiting for his cab on the Saturday morning, the maid-servant of the presbytery asked him for his autograph. He wrote in her album *Jhesu, Jhesu, esto michi Jhesu!* explaining to her the archaic orthography of the Holy Name.

Father Kelroe, then rector of Ulverstone, had in vain tried to persuade him to abandon his mission, but he refused. At most he broke off later engagements.

"Yes : here I am," he wrote one day. "But I'm not up to much, and with 'False Angina,' and no smoking allowed, and exercise impossible because of instant pain : and a series of Evidence Lectures. . . ."

And to another :

I feel terribly ill ; but I'm told that's all part of the "falseness" of the Angina. But it's terribly plausible.

On October 10 he returned to Salford, moving very slowly, and on October 11 preached again, but without his usual gestures. On Monday he started for London, but he wrote to the Rev. C. Morris of Bury, Lancashire, that same day :

I am terribly sorry ; but on the way to the station to-day I was seized with such dreadful heart-pain that I had to come back at once and have a doctor. He tells me it isn't disease : but an abnormal state of heart nerves brought on by over-work : and he absolutely forbids me to preach such a course as that which I hoped to preach in your church. . . I don't know how to express my

regrets. But—there it is ! I can't even walk upstairs now,—more than three steps at a time ! So please try to forgive me.

The nights became intolerable : he could only surmount his suffocating pain by standing up : he wandered about in the corridors, merely tossing a cloak upon his shoulders, and even went out thus into the court of Bishop's House. It was impossible to persuade him back to bed. Despite intervals of ease, in one of which he suggested to a priest of that house that they should visit a cinematograph—a show which amused and exhausted him—he grew worse. A specialist was summoned. He, too, diagnosed the false angina, but in addition to this, pneumonia had now set in.

Mr. A. C. Benson has told of the summons which soon reached him from Canon Sharrock, of Salford, and of his midnight journey to Manchester. As through the gaunt stations his train sped northward, other trains, full of soldiers, asleep or singing, passed him on their way to London or to France. . . . And in the long approaches to the grim city, folks slumbered behind their shutters ; and huge mills and factories, staring and all night wide-awake, stood high above the black houses and the streets. Over tall viaducts and on sunk canals, and in the factories, the restless life of the country was thrusting its way forward, while in the austere Bishop's House at Salford, Hugh's life was finishing. For it was indeed in this place of workaday Catholicism, having no romance of a Hare Street or a Caldey that one should desire it, that he was to die ; and, after his one frustrated dash for London and his own people, he would not have had it otherwise. Mr. Benson made his way through the gate and garden of the house : in its sombre façade Hugh's window put a flickering

square. A priest came to the door : Hugh was asleep ; Mr. Benson was unexpected ; it would be impossible to make him comfortable at that hour. A hotel hard by was indicated. Through the grey rain he returned at nine o'clock. The arched corridors of the great house, with their cold light and scent of stone and of incense, strange to him, led Mr. Benson to the Throne-room, where the senior Canon and the doctors met him. The illness, they said, was grave : the pneumonia had found its victim exhausted by overwork ; and, though they still kept hope, and sought to communicate it, they feared the issue. The library, where Hugh was, is reached directly from the Throne-room. To the Canon's knock, Hugh's voice said, clearly and resonantly, "Come in." He lay there in bed, not talking much, for his throat hurt him, but full of humour and brightness. He felt, he repeated, really better : his brother might safely return home next day. He attended to his will—made as a mere precaution, he urged : he was not going to die—he had thought he would yesterday, but now he was so much better. Mr. Benson left him, and returned while Hugh tried to eat his lunch, after which Hugh talked again, and then felt drowsy, and his brother left him. Dr. Bradley acknowledged, now, his anxiety. Hugh might pull through if he could keep up his strength for several days. It would be long and critical anyhow. Hugh was a difficult patient. "He is not afraid, but he is excitable, and is always asking for relief and suggesting remedies." His hopefulness was, above everything, to be kept up : hence, on no account must his other relations be sununoned.

The late afternoon was anxious : Hugh became faint ; he asked for whisky ; it did but little good : oxygen revived him. But Mr. Benson was told to move his things across

to the Bishop's House, and there he became the guest of hosts who gladly showed to him that sympathetic hospitality which still is grateful to his memory. At ten o'clock Mr. Benson looked in once more into his brother's room. He was sleeping quietly.

Already upon Saturday, October 17, Canon Sharrock had warned Hugh of his danger and had given him the last sacraments, and Hugh had made his profession of faith in a strong voice. Viaticum was given to him on Sunday morning, before, that is, Mr. Arthur Benson's first visit. Such was Hugh's composure that he not only made the responses himself, but corrected the Canon when, in his emotion, he made a slip in the prayer *Misereatur*.

Then, at about one on the Monday morning, a sudden taper shone through the glass window above Mr. Benson's door, and the Canon was there to warn the sleeper that he must come quickly. Monsignor Benson had felt that he was dying, and had told the Canon so, and had added the words, *God's Will be done*. It was then that he asked if his brother was near at hand. "Yes," he was told; "he is in the house." "Thank God," Hugh answered. While Mr. Benson was on his way, Canon Sharrock read the prayers for the dying. Hugh joined in, serenely as ever, and made the responses.

"When I entered," Mr. A. C. Benson wrote afterwards, "Hugh fixed his eyes on me with a strange smile, with something triumphant in it, and said in a clear natural voice, 'Arthur, this is the end!' I knelt down near the bed. He looked at me, and I knew in a way that we understood each other well, that he wanted no word or demonstration, but was just glad I was with him. The prayers began again. Hugh crossed himself faintly once or twice, made a response or two. Then he said: 'I beg your pardon—one moment—my love to them all.' The big room was brightly lit; something on the hearth boiled



over, and the nurse went across the room. Hugh said to me: 'You will make certain I am dead, won't you?' I said 'Yes,' and then the prayers went on. Suddenly he said to the nurse: 'Nurse, is it any good my resisting death—making any effort?' The nurse said: 'No, Monsignor; just be as quiet as you can.' He closed his eyes at this, and his breath came quicker. Presently he opened his eyes again and looked at me, and said in a low voice: 'Arthur, don't look at me! Nurse, stand between my brother and me!' He moved his hand to indicate where she should stand. I knew well what was in his mind; we had talked not long before of the shock of certain sights, and how a dreadful experience could pierce through the reason and wound the inner spirit; and I knew that he wished to spare me the shock of seeing him die. Once or twice he drew up his hands as though trying to draw breath, and sighed a little; but there was no struggle or apparent pain. He spoke once more and said: 'Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.' The nurse had her hand upon his pulse, and presently laid his hand down, saying: 'It is all over.' He looked very pale and boyish then, with wide open eyes and parted lips. I kissed his hand which was warm and firm, and went out with Canon Sharrock, who said to me: 'It was wonderful! I have seen many people die, but no one ever so easily and quickly!'

"It was wonderful indeed! It seemed to me then, in that moment, strange rather than sad. He had been himself to the very end, no diminution of vigour, no yielding, no humiliation, with all his old courtesy and thoughtfulness, and collectedness. And at the same time, I felt, a real adventurousness—that is the only word I can use. I recognised that we were only the spectators, and that he was in command of the scene. He had made haste to die, and he had gone, as he was always used to do, straight from one finished task to another that waited for him. It was not like an end; it was as though he had turned a corner, and was passing on, out of sight but still unquestionably there. It seemed to me like the death of a soldier or a knight, in its calmness of courage, its splendid facing of the last extremity, its magnificent determination to experience, open-eyed and vigilant, the dark crossing."

On Monday evening Mrs. Benson arrived in Manchester ; and on the next evening her son's body, which she had seen in the morning for the last time, singularly youthful and radiant with the dawn of death, was taken by the Cathedral clergy to the midnight train. Mr. E. F. Benson took it from Buntingford to Hare Street chapel, and there, all Wednesday and Thursday, it reposed. On Friday Dr. Driscoll of Westminster Cathedral celebrated a solemn Requiem in the presence of the Cardinal Archbishop, and six boys of the Cathedral choir sang the Gregorian chant. Some thirty of his nearer friends filled the little chapel. It will not, I think, be their wish that their names should be catalogued.

At the foot of the Calvary in the garden a grave had been prepared, and in this he was laid, his chalice and paten being placed upon his coffin. Over his grave a slab has since been placed with the simple inscription of his own devising :

HIC JACET  
ROBERTUS HUGO BENSON  
SACERDOS CATHOLICAE  
ET ROMANAE ECCLESIAE  
PECCATOR EXPECTANS AD  
REVELATIONEM FILIORUM DEI  
—R—I—P—  
OBIIIT XIX DIE OCTOBRIS  
A.S. MDCCCXCIV  
ET AETATIS SUAE XLIII<sup>1</sup>

Hare Street House and its appurtenances passed by his will to the Archbishop of Westminster and his successors,

<sup>1</sup> Here lies / Robert Hugh Benson / Priest of the Catholic / and Roman Church / A sinner, looking unto the / Revelation of the Sons of God / R.I.P.

A small chapel is now, by the generosity of a friend, being built over the grave. The rose garden, by the delicate thought of Miss Grueber, of London, has been filled with roses exactly as Hugh had designed that it should be.

with a sum of money for its upkeep : earlier, it had been his hope to see cripples, or aged priests, or schoolboys, or invalids at least, finding a home in it. But he cancelled these suggestions, and left it as I have said. The will, singularly, had been signed by two witnesses not in each other's presence, nor in his. It was invalid ; and only after proceedings in a court of law could his wishes be carried out, as they have been, exactly.

Characteristically, dare I say, dreams are to be read of at the closing of this chapter, too, of his spiritual history. On the Monday, October 19th, Dr. Mostyn, the Bishop of Menevia, who was at Caldey, said to a fellow-guest, " I had an extraordinary dream last night : or rather, early this morning. I dreamed that Benson was dead, and that he had died suddenly. I remember thinking : ' What a good thing that he had just been making his retreat here ! ' " The other guest was startled : he had seen the news that Benson was ill, and asked the Bishop if he had known of this. He answered no ; and put his dream down to the fact that he had been reading *Initiation* before he went to bed. On Tuesday, while crossing to Tenby, he repeated his experience to his two companions ; and on reaching the mainland bought a paper : in it he read that Monsignor Benson had died early on Monday morning. There was a spiritual and sacramental tie between Hugh and the Bishop who had confirmed him ; the dreamer, too, had slept where Hugh, while at Caldey, had slept. Hugh would have noted these details, and I record them.

In this way, therefore, Hugh Benson passed on into his fuller life. For no Christian will experience even the temptation to feel that his activity is finished, or his living reality put away and done with. Even in his phase of effort in this half-real, twilight world, nothing was, for him, com-

pleted or rounded off : he hurried away with the synthesis still imperfect ; the contradictions unreconciled ; and the paradox, which he loved to say his life was, still startling ; a hundred promises unfulfilled, and with never a suggestion that his achievements were anything for him or us to rest upon. "Trust death, nor be afraid." We, in our fashion, have the right to speak as if a future were yet all before him : he in his spiritual mode of consciousness and action, is more present a force in the series of our days than ever when he was visible amongst us, playing with life's manifold gifts, crying aloud from pulpits, concocting books, catching hold of hand after hand, and passing each one on to God, if he would but go, and himself hastening towards God.

To pass judgment is, it may be believed, no part of human duty. To make an epigrammatic verdict on Hugh Benson were, of course, impossible ; and even the desire to try to do so must be quenched for anyone who may read the conflicting conclusions arrived at, and so emphatically declared, by those who believe they knew him well, and are, indeed, worthy of all most scrupulous attention. "He was a Saint of God," one letter after another will declare : then, "be *sure* to say," one who has especial claim to hearing writes to me, "that he was, anyhow, no sort or kind of *Saint*." "He was a Saint," a third has said ; "but a peculiar one ; a Saint of *Nature*." He was self-forgetful : he never was un-selfconscious. He was a genius, and could create : he was a dilettante—could assimilate, or rearrange, or convey with unique charm, ideas not his own. "He was above all things humble," one after another writes. And another and another that he was thoroughly self-willed ; that he cultivated the virtues that he *liked*, "having his sense of righteousness thoroughly in hand" ; he was most lovable when least disciplined ; "he had the

sort of subtlety," a lady who knew him as few have known him says, "which a child has in carrying out his own will whatever the rest of us thought or did. Whether we approved or disapproved, he went on playing his own games." "We loved him most for his personal charm:" yet, "what men most saw and liked in him was his most intimate temptation." He was a hard logician: he was a dreamer; impish; off at a hundred tangents. He was beyond all else sincere: he was always dressing up. "Write a whole chapter on his *kindness*:" "the moment he was uninterested, he let you slide." He was so gentle: he was so rough. "He was the ideal Catholic priest." "He was simply Robert Hugh Benson."

These are a few of the verdicts passed by no superficial observers or chance acquaintances: none of them may a student omit gratefully and carefully to consider; and he will try to account for their variety and for the vigour of their expression.

That the verdicts are vigorous is not wonderful. Hugh was a vivid person, tingling with vitality, and the view which was taken of him, favourable or the reverse, could not possibly be vague. This was due partly to a general temperamental quality, partly to the tendency in Hugh to feel that the mood of the moment was exhaustive and destined to be permanent. He was rarely, then, hesitating or *tinted*: his colours were bold and his words incisive, and he created clear-cut impressions. In reality, he passed from one mood to another with the greatest rapidity and completeness, and had an astonishing power of forgetting what he had felt like in the mood of a moment ago, what he had wanted or decided, or even that the mood with its concomitants and consequences had existed. He revealed, too, one side of himself to the exclusion of the other, in

response not only to his own mood, but to what the mood of his companion might call for. Whatever his own attitude of will and judgment, he constantly "played up," with genuinely keen interest and unflinching courtesy, to the requirements of his consultant.

It has, therefore, seemed a duty to set forth, as carefully as might be, the available evidence, omitting little enough, lest even one fleeting, yet significant expression of a personality might be lost, and regretting even what, in deference to the sensitiveness of living persons, I have deliberately excised. Had the witness been more homogeneous, this book might—how pleasantly!—have been far shorter. As it is, in the midst of so many shifting impressions, I have tried, not to judge, but to interpret—in part gratefully trusting, and in part guarding against, the bias of affection and admiration, and helped at every paragraph by those who not only put their knowledge at the disposal of (in so many cases) a stranger, but who re-read their words in the context into which they had been worked, and still approved them. For the errors of detail, which may be many, I can but ask their pardon.

Hugh Benson, then, received from his parents a nervous system almost too sensitive, and a brain almost too busy with the perceptions transmitted to it. Some mysterious toughness, though, of fibre was in this child, which caused it to resist relentlessly all that attacked its personality; and enabled it to throw off by instantaneous instinct what made for disintegration and so destruction of the self. Thus Clevedon and Eton may be disregarded, almost, as formative periods: Hugh Benson never was a typical Eton man. But this power to reject alien environments was enormously assisted by the homes in which he lived; not all, there, was congenial; but enough was amply so, for the pro-

tection and nourishing of his soul. Negatively, this Puritan atmosphere protected his imagination; the romantic and inexhaustible resources of Lis Escop, Lambeth, and Addington gave it all the colour, the variety, and the pleurably strange which might be needed to prevent its losing itself, in practice, along summoning paths of the bizarre, the horrible, the splendidly corrupt, or other lines of psychic rebellion or despair. The alternate stimulus and check of so remarkable a father and an incomparable mother made the boy grow up neither repressed nor dissolute; daring, yet not extravagant. His life already had in it something of a ritual, in which a certain rigidity of outline remains sacrosanct, with much liberty of interior ornamentation, and adaptation; and it was something too of a sacrament, where the material, however trivial seeming, is never otherwise than charged with the dynamic, and the spirit. It is the spirit, strangely, which most gets fostered, when Eton is left behind; in the unwelcoming atmosphere of the London crammer's the vision of Jesus dawns; and that experience remains unique: for the rest of the young man's life, no interest, no attraction, and later, no intellectual challenge or solicitation will even be listened to which bids the thought occupy itself, however briefly, with what may prove derogatory to that inviolable Name. Even at Cambridge, the intellect is not so much sent wide in exploration, as bidden to be active in its favourite domains.

A sense of power came with dawning manhood; and Cambridge gave Hugh Benson enough new consciousness of this to keep him grateful to its memory. A first shock is given to his world when his sister dies. The horizons define themselves a little; he will be a priest, and work somewhere within the spacious vineyards which the Archbishop ruled. A brief crisis is surmounted; and a moment

of panic lest liberty to live his life should henceforward be denied him. But, ordained deacon, he grips the new duties, and in a short while is conscious that the work at Hackney Wick is not one of them. The decision was made not frivolously. He gave himself a fair trial ; and left honourably for that garden vicarage of Kensing where his soul should no more wilt and shrivel beneath the contact of the sordid, nor perish beneath the bludgeoning of work which, for it, was brutal. Yet neither at Kensing should he find a home. The months at the Eton Mission had had in them this of value : Father Maturin's retreat had shown him Christianity—which, hitherto, had really meant for him, over and above conventional judgment and behaviour, the individualist's experience of the sweetness of the Lord—to be a Life which should organically connect with his own that of his fellow-men, knitting them up into that organism, chief of sacraments, which must be called the Church ; and at Kensing he knew that while his tastes, even religious, were being fondled and flattered, and his piously artistic propensities enormously developed, yet that spiritual discipline of submission and incorporation, which was so necessary for him of all men, was lacking. His departure from Kensing, then, was a flight, yet a most brave flight, for he sought what was bracing, a tonic—almost, the spiritual strait-jacket of which his still fluid nature stood in need. He would seek, then, a Community ; and, since his momentous voyage to the East had taught him that the English Church, as normally she was known, belied the name of Catholic, he turned to the strenuous house of Mirfield, whose alleged ideal it was to re-invigorate and re-catholicise her, restoring to her those lost birth-privileges ; and offering to his hopes a life free, yet orderly ; variegated, yet coherent and firm-planted ; stimulating, yet



governed. Mirfield in fact gave him much, revealing him and his talents yet further to himself. Yet even the discipline of Mirfield was not enough for him ; the intellect, timid still, yet challenged, now, revealed all sorts of hollow places in the foundation of his personal religion : *opinions* might, he felt, play him false even as did his artist's temperament ; thought, he saw, permitted itself to scrutinise that very thing which for him, as a primary conviction, was not to be tampered with—the knowledge of Jesus Christ. From Mirfield in its turn Hugh fled, seeking an authority that not Mirfield claimed to give him. All his life, by now, was inspired by religion : to lose that soul of it, would mean death. To preserve that most intimate self, he fled to identify it with the greater Self of Christ in his Church ; to identify it, not merely to set it among, and side by side with, his fellow-Christians. That is what he meant, when he declared that his conversion was a paradox. To preserve a life recognised as more than all other forms most intimately his own, he subjected it to the most intimate and intrusive and coercive of all laws ; for the sake of freedom, sought for the most absolute of Authority ; for the salvation of the individual in him, made himself a tiniest part in the most colossal organisation the world has seen. Yet it will be clear enough that here is but the negative statement of a most positive desire, process, and event. To neglect this positive element, leads straight to the most colossal misinterpretation of Benson's life that could possibly be made. It has indeed been made, by those who permit themselves to imagine that not through faith, but through fear, through unfaith, in fact, Benson became a Catholic. That Benson saw that for him to remain in Anglicanism would lead straight to scepticism was a clear enough vision, and it is not for me to deny its validity.

But he made no blind rush away from it. He made no sort of surrender of his reason. Benson is not a person who can be exploited by an interested controversialist. He became a Catholic not only because he believed Anglicanism to be false, but because he believed Catholicism to be true ; and this he did, passionately, and would have done even if there had been (as there so well might be) no Anglicanism in existence. There, by the teaching of reason, of heart, and of grace, he perceived the Faith, once for all delivered, to exist ; and thither then went he, at the cost of sacrifice to himself and suffering to his dearest wholly illegitimate and perhaps impossible, from any but the most positive, substantial, and supernatural motives. Henceforward he will develop, and not deviate. Down to the end of his life loyal to Catholic doctrine of faith and morals, he will be able to follow his most widely divergent instincts without fear. His intellect and his will are infallibly guided ; the source of their life is indefectible.

From Woodchester he passes to Rome. There at the foot of Peter's throne he plays, like the Innocents on the Altar steps. Daring and docile together, he bewilders those for whom daring connotes insubordination, and docility involves, for the most part, conventionality. Utterly unlike the life of his contemporaries, or of most converts whether in Rome or elsewhere, his life remains his own, yet is fed and waxes strong, and learns what it is to be part of the great Roman Catholic current. He returns, a priest. A painful year of rest is imposed upon this ardent soul ; yet even this rest is strenuous, and he finds that, external claims being reduced to a minimum, the stored impressions of such agitated years leap forth, and the production of his literary work accelerates itself.

Under the large-minded government of Monsignor Scott, in the Cambridge Rectory, all pressures, save one, finance, are taken off him : his life can blossom forth in every direction which its law desires : at last it grows up, and, in the Catholic air, its fragrance is recognised. His enormous activity, however, quickly ruined the delicate instrument which his soul was bound to use ; nor can we be other than grateful that he was spared at least this—to be as eager as ever, in his inmost spirit, for work and labour, and then to find that the sheer mechanism was worn out : that the hand was growing too heavy to take up pen or raise itself in pulpit ; that the very brain was too worn-out to produce the vehicle for the thought. And what if the very interests had failed ? the inspiration flagged ? What if the terrible numbness of middle-age had settled down even on the inner encasement of the spirit, once so responsive and so active ? There were infinitesimal signs that even this was coming : the activities of religion, every now and then, presented themselves, all but imperceptibly, as sheer business, necessitating sharp alternations of excitement. I have said that this prospect brought him moments—not more—of panic and of torture. As it was, the entire organism, not only the creative part of it, gave out ; and Hugh Benson, unresisting, died.

May it not then be said that only by the help of the Catholic doctrine of the supernatural can his life receive its richest interpretation ? It is, of course, clear that to regard Hugh as a man of extraordinary charm, of generally fastidious taste, of versatility, of talent, is but to build up a thin and flimsy phantasm of him. That “weak and beggarly ABC,” as St. Paul might name it, would give not even the scattered syllables of the great Word which his animating vision formed. Nor by the supernatural

elements in him do I, of course, mean anything merely superadded to his nature ; not even a merely extrinsic code or dogma, nor even his life of piety as such, though it is not nothing that throughout his life a man should pray, and keep his soul in the attitude of worship, and be rarely unconscious, as the years go by, of God beneath the shimmering lights and shadows of phenomena. The Supernatural, in fine, is the raising of the whole man, by God's grace, to a higher state of being, directed towards an incomparable fruition of Himself, in which nothing is lost, nothing merely replaced, but everything transfigured, perfected, and harmonised. "His Roman Catholicism," a very careful critic has written to me, "sat but lightly, in reality, upon him : to the end he was *Hugh*." Certainly, he was Hugh. But not for that was his Catholic super-nature a light and husk-like garment. No mere garment was it, but an inner principle issuing into bones and blood and skin. Grace destroys nothing but that sin which is alone destructive. It works from within outwards. In Hugh, it preserved an innocence already in many ways safeguarded ; it shielded it from temptations, and guarded it in temptations, subtle as are not those of most men. It carried him along an ascending path, step by step fitted for his feet ; it lifted him without crippling violence from the lower to the higher in that sphere which the Creator of his nature had Himself prepared ; and it alchemised that nature,—so as by fire, it well may be, but by no deadly flame—into that supernatural being of whose existence we learn by faith, though "what we shall be, it has not yet appeared." In other ways his life may indeed be construed, yet not more easily ; above all, not more comprehensively. Hugh "lived *his* life" precisely because he lived by that which in it was divine. Let it therefore be considered as a transit ; let it

be observed not only in the undifferentiated forms of its beginning ; nor let its last hours be regarded as its end.

Me receptet Sion illa,  
Sion, David Urbs tranquilla ;  
Cuius Faber, Auctor lucis,  
Cuius porta, signum Crucis,  
Cuius claves lingua Petri,  
Cuius cives semper laeti ;  
Cuius muri lapis vivus,  
Cuius custos Rex festivus.  
In hac Urbe lux sollemnis,  
Ver aeternum, pax perennis.



## APPENDIX





## APPENDIX

I. See I., p. 58

IN 1881 Hugh produced a small book of poems, of which two fragments survive. That they are reminiscent of *Il Penseroso* need not trouble us so much as the fact that a boy of ten should have been reading Milton may astonish us. George Herbert is for something in them too, I expect. These few lines are printed, as they stand, for the sake of memory.

BENSON

Hence, wretched idleness !  
Thou camest from idle joys,  
And from the foolish toys  
And nature's empty vanity,  
But come, Minerva, come, O wisdom free,  
I pray thee come, only teach me.

BENSON

Jucundissimus somnus.  
Hence, ugly fiend !  
I hope from thee I ever shall be screened.  
Thou camest from Hades low,  
And with thee brought the dreary, dark grey crow,  
The hated spirit of wakeful spirit of (wakefulness).  
But come, thou goddess, everlasting Sleep !  
Now close to thee I evermore will keep,  
And see sweet dreams and hear  
Such strains as always win the ear. [. . .]  
But they are gone ; the man doth wake,  
And out of doors his way doth take.  
He in the evening does come home,  
Whilst wind about the trees doth moan,  
And then ready he takes his seat,  
And the brown loaf he then doth eat ;  
Then, returning to his sleep,  
Dreams and dreams in fancies deep.

In 1887 or 1888 Hugh wrote, being then sixteen or seventeen years old, a story about a ghost in Lambeth Palace. He climbs Morton's Tower, and emerges into the full red evening sunlight.

It was a most glorious view. Behind the Houses of Parliament, which appeared deep blue, by reason of the smoky haze that hung over the river, the sun was just going down. A great curtain of smoke was rising up from the houses beyond, and was drifting slowly along to the left, coloured a great rich orange, with a few black lines of cloud.

Notice how developed is his colour-sense already. He lingers over the topographical details, and the blunted effects of sound and motion reach him from far below. Two men appear on the embankment: one of them turns towards Morton's Tower. "At first I could not see his face from the glare of the water behind him." There again is a power of rapid visualisation. But the sun dips, and Hugh can see that over the man's face passes a look of hideous terror. He is staring at a window below the boy, who peers over the battlement, but can see nothing. The man calls his companion's attention. He too stares, turning ghastly with fear; they fly. Here again, I think, is an exceedingly clever utilisation of the horror sprung from the unknown. However, at last Hugh sees, leaning from the window below, a Cardinal-like figure, with a sapphire ring. The face is invisible from above; but the figure as a whole terrifies the onlooker. He recovers courage; calls; drops a piece of mortar to attract attention. An aged, corpse-like face looks up; a voice is heard, "I will come up and see you." The boy tries to hold the door against the ascending figure. Idle effort. The old man steps on to the roof; the boy slips past, and flies down the stairs, horribly pursued. He is run to earth, as it were, in a certain room. The old man peers round the door.

He stroked his beard with his left hand, the sapphire ring seeming to light up his face with a strange misty light; but he said nothing. The sapphire seemed to grow larger and brighter, but with the veiled light of a moonstone,<sup>1</sup> till it seemed to be a luminous mist filling the doorway. I had sunk on the ground, and was watching his glaring white eyes and the sapphire; and I remember wondering, even at that moment, how it was he could see with those great eyes with no pupils, and why he did not come in.

Then he fainted. The ghost was Cardinal Morton, and the little room, his oratory.

The other story, dated "87, 88, 89?" is less, to my mind, personally characterised. It involves a dusky moor in Ireland; a large half-

<sup>1</sup> You will trace Hugh's love of moonstones continually, till in *Loneliness* they appear for the last time, being always combined with some blue jewel—turquoises there,—as also in the pattern for the Hare Street chalice.

ruined castle, elaborately described ; an ancient porter ; corridors lined with sloping mirrors, so that none might approach unseen ; a looking-glass room hideously peopled with innumerable replicas of its one tenant, a wide-eyed, frightened, moaning man. Four hundred years before, a traveller had been refused hospitality at the castle, and had left, as a curse, that when four centuries had passed, Fate should strike the then owner of the castle from behind. The traveller had died at half-past nine, and that was the hour which the terrified man was dreading. Night comes : the air grows thick with fear and despair ; the candle wanes. A vague figure looms in the air. It touches the victim, uttering the one word "Fate." "I spoke to the man ; he made no answer. I touched him, and looked in his face, but a change had come over it. The candle flared up and went out." So the story finishes. It needs no appraisal. Only, how sound is the artistic sense which dictates this lightly touched-in ending !

II. See I., p. 204

#### THE LIVING VOICE

##### I

"I believe that our Lord has founded a Church, and that the voice of this Church is His voice. That there is not an *exact or precise test of this Church ; but that, roughly, it consists of those bodies which have retained the Creeds, the Sacraments, and the three-fold ministry. That the Church of England satisfies these demands.* That the Voice of the Church, then, is found, not in the appeal to a single Bishop, however eminent, or however widely recognised ; nor exclusively in the appeal to the Undivided Church, before the schism of East and West, but that it is to be found in the general consent of all those parts of the Church that satisfy the demands stated above, even if that consent is not embodied in any actual decree or dogma. *In other words, the Living Voice to-day is to be found in the witness of the Church Diffusive.*"

Now in all Roman controversial books that I am aware of, this theory is never dealt with. It is supposed that the English Churchman *either appeals to the Church of England by herself* (and this, of course, can be easily demolished), *or else to the writers of primitive Christianity* (this also can be demolished), *or else to a future General Council* (which, humanly speaking, is no appeal at all under the circumstances).

I should be grateful for criticisms on the above theory. At present it appears to me to be, on the whole, the theory that satisfies most difficulties more—*e.g.*, than the theory of the Papacy; though not, of course, all. It seems to be the theory of the early centuries (*e.g.* *Securus judicat . . .*) and to be, so far as it is not presumptuous to say so, most in accordance, in its spirit, with the method of our Blessed Lord, who *did not often give direct answers, but left the truth to be slowly developed and inferred.*

If it be said that this theory be impracticable, and that the ordinary man, apart from scholars and men of leisure, needs a direct guide, I would answer that the appeal to the Pope is equally out of the question for the ordinary man. That as the ordinary Roman Catholic receives the decision of the Pope at the mouth of a priest, who acknowledges the final authority of the Pope, and who is bound to verify that any doctrine he utters is of the faith of the Pope, so the ordinary "Catholic," as I conceive him, receives the decisions of the Church Diffusive at the mouth of any priest *who acknowledges the authority of the Church Diffusive.* Of course both the Roman Catholic priest and the "Church Diffusive" priest are fallible, and may misinterpret the decisions of their "infallible" head; but they will be, on the whole, sufficiently safe guides as to what their respective oracles declare.<sup>1</sup>

I would also add that the defection of one "branch" (*e.g.* the Irish Church in the matter of the Real Presence) no more invalidates the general consent of the rest, than the defection of a few Bishops would invalidate the general consent of the rest of the Œcumenical Council.

## II

The strongest argument of all against the Pope's claims seems to me the negative argument. The Roman Catholic believes that from the beginning it was necessary to be in communion with Rome to be in communion with the Catholic Church. *Then why do we not find that explicitly and undeniably stated again and again in Fathers and Councils and private writings?*

All that the Roman Catholic apologist appears to be able to do, is to quote a very few isolated passages, many of them *capable*

<sup>1</sup> That this remark is tolerably supported by experience, is seen from the fact that there is a real unity of practice and faith among those who are called Catholics in the Church of England; yet, on the Roman Catholics' showing, there ought to be terrible division among them. But there is at least as much union among them as among Roman Catholics themselves.

of other interpretations, and the remainder, very few in number, *at the best proving that individuals here and there at certain moments, e.g., of exaltation, held something of the kind.* But an article of faith so fundamental and vital surely must have been mentioned in the very earliest ages of the Church, repeatedly, as the one test; we should have expected treatises on it—as on Baptism, &c. Why this extreme rarity and doubtfulness, *cf.* opposite quotations.

There are, too, many passages where we should have obviously expected it—where it was the one plain answer; but it is not there (*e.g.* what Gore quotes of St. Chrysostom in *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 50. Richardson's answer is quite unintelligible to me. Again, Cyprian, *De Unitate*, in its uninterpolated form; St. Vincent of L. Both omit what the modern Roman Catholic would put first of all. *Can you conceive a modern Roman Catholic priest writing or speaking on the unity of the Church in the tone of so many Fathers, without putting forward unmistakably and transparently the fact that it is necessary to be in communion with Rome to be in communion with the Catholic Church?*) How is it possible for so many sincere, humble, learned, and good-living persons to be so very much puzzled about what Roman Catholics say is so fundamental—persons, I mean, who accept humbly all other mysteries of the faith?

I suppose that the Roman Catholic answer will be in the following direction, viz. that the doctrine of the necessity of being in communion with Rome was not explicitly perceived or held at first, and therefore, in a sense (looking at it subjectively) was not as necessary then as it is now. But (unless I am wrong in this) this seems unsatisfactory as regards such a fundamental "fact." If true at all, it is very nearly as fundamental as the being of God—as the fact, though not the explicit definition, of the Incarnation, and certainly as fundamental as the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and these latter truths are not capable of actual development along true lines. They must be *explicitly* held from the beginning. One cannot develop *foundations without destroying the house.*

Supposing I were willing to allow (and I think I am) that I understand our Lord's "intention" to have been that St. Peter and his successors should be the centre of unity for the whole Christian world; yet that does not in any way establish their infallibility. Our Lord equally intended St. Peter and his successors to be *the centre of holiness.* Yet that does not involve their impeccability. Also,

how, if Popes are above Councils, can Councils *lawfully depose Popes*, as I understand is allowed to have been done? Are Popes only superior to Councils as regards dogmatic decrees, but inferior as regards other matters?

Again, although it appears to have been our Lord's "intention" that the Pope should be the centre of unity, yet it does not follow that that "intention" may not be frustrated by the will and sin of man; so that by the Pope's own action he may give just cause to the *faithful to separate from him*. It seems that we must distinguish in our Lord's "intentions" between those which cannot fail (*e.g.* the supernatural unity of the Church, the transmission of Holy Orders, &c.) and those which can and do fail (*e.g.* the perfect holiness of all baptized Christians; perfect charity between them). What proof is there that our Lord's "intention" as to the centre of unity belongs to the first, and not to the second class?

#### IV

It is held, I fancy, by Roman Catholics that the Pope is practically of a separate order from all other ecclesiastical persons. He shares, indeed, their "sacerdotium," and is equal to them in that, but he possesses something different in kind from them, as regards his infallibility.

Then why is there no ordination or consecration or definitely sacramental act by which he receives this gift? At what moment, or by what ceremony, does he receive this peculiar indwelling of the Holy Ghost? Does not the very circumstance of the *election of the Pope, unaccompanied by anything even remotely sacramental*, tend to show that the papacy is of human origin? (Of course no one would dare to directly introduce at any particular point a rite not originally necessary, into such a process.) Does not all this support the view that the Pope was never until comparatively recently regarded by theologians as anything more than a kind of very eminent patriarch, or possibly as the centre of unity, but certainly not as being of a higher *order* than a bishop? If it be said that as regards "order" he is only a bishop, this would seem rather to beg the point. Is it not reasonable to regard one whose prerogatives and powers are so unique and awful as being of a different order? Is there not a difficulty, too, to be found in the fact that there is no true spiritual succession between Popes? Between each there is a break in the chain—supplied by who? cardinals? or the Church acting through cardinals? Then is not

the supreme power in the Church, and not in the Pope? If the Pope had laid his hands upon his successor from the beginning, it would all be very different.

## V

## TOLERATION OF HERESY

1°. We are informed by controversialists that toleration of heresy is itself equivalent to heresy. Does the Church of Rome officially teach this? If so, is it not universally allowed that Honorius *tolerated* heresy. Then . . . &c.

2°. Besides, "toleration of heresy" is a large term, and may mean very different things. Obviously the fact that I am in the same communion with those who hold heretical views may be called "toleration of heresy," and it is in this sense that Roman Catholic controversialists use it. Yet it is certainly equally true of themselves. There must be those who hold heretical views somewhere in the Roman Catholic communion. If, however, the Roman Catholic says that the authorities of the Roman Church are more zealous in excommunication than those of the Church of England, of course I agree. But it is a matter of *degree*, *not of difference*. If a man was proved to be a heretic, whether among Roman Catholics or ourselves, he would be excommunicated; only Roman Catholics are quicker and braver, and draw the lines closer than ourselves. All therefore that the Roman Catholic can say justly is that if A. B. were in the same attitude of mind towards Church authority and owed obedience to Rome, he would be excommunicated. Certainly—but does this amount to much? *No man is actually a heretic until he is pronounced to be one by competent authority.* I should be very grateful for a short statement as to the relations between "Ultramontanes" and "Liberals" in the Roman Communion. Is it true there is a very wide and terrible divergence between them—that the "Ultras" regard the Pope as infallible by himself whenever he addresses the faithful on a matter of faith or morals, and intends it as a definition of doctrine, and that the Liberals (among whom is to be reckoned the Pope himself) regard him as only infallible when he utters the voice of the Church, after deliberation with a Council, and after finding he possesses the vote of the Council; in other words, that he is merely the person who utters the decision of the Œcumenical Council? (This may be inaccurate in technical language, but I think the meaning is sufficiently clear.)

Is it true that the "Liberals" are growing, and that they have succeeded in establishing the above reading of the Vatican Decrees as a lawful interpretation—which interpretation the Council at the time intended to exclude? I should be most grateful for general comments in brief, on this—with references. I should like both views stated, as extremes, so far as those extremes are permitted by authority, with an indication of the direction in which they may be reconciled. The "Liberal" view, I suppose, could be held without difficulty by many persons who are kept away from the Roman Catholic Communion by the "Ultramontane" view. I dare say I am entirely and ludicrously wrong about all this; but what I have stated is certainly believed by many English clergy like myself. Of what practical value, too, is the Pope's infallibility, if there is no universally recognised criterion by which it may be known when he is speaking infallibly?

### III. See II., p. 60

The original plan of *The Conventionalists*: I give this exactly as it stands in his notes.

#### *Sequel to "The Sentimentalists"*

Part I brings Chris up to the point of retiring to a seminary. His vocation comes gradually through steady perseverance in sacraments. He announces it to Dick at Christmas.

Part II brings him up to apostasy. This is brought about by weariness of routine. He mistakes routine for reality, the grinding nature of trifles. Lady Brasted becomes a Catholic, and puts him off by dreadful superficiality.

Part III brings him to his death-bed—where Dick receives him back; and he dies in deep penitence after confession.

Conclusion—his funeral.

(III.) Now Chris is brought back by the mystic. He understands the analogical nature of religion. Mr. Rolls really does it, by flatly refusing to argue scholastically. It is scholasticism seen one-sidedly that puts him off. An incident of his absolving a dying woman after his apostasy.

(II.) He is sent as curate to a provincial church, Wroxton, near Esher, in diocese of Brighton. Describe Georgian chapel, a stiff "old Catholic," his desire to sweep clean, steady snubs. Yet priest is a good man—promises himself to come to Dick—it is as promise draws near that he apostatises.



(I.) His sight of a religious house—fervour, zeal; Gothic church—sense of aspiration—famous convert the Superior—ascetic, sympathetic.

All this has a line drawn through it.

On the next page the plan is produced in a modified way.

## PART I

Prefatory letter to Dick, explaining that last book was written within a week of Chris's apostasy. Now that time has passed. All right.

Chap. I. A cheerful party at Amplefield; reintroduces characters, including myself. Chris's talk. Dick's friendliness—talk about Brasteds—Rolls much older—stroke.

Chap. II. Visit to Redemptorist house. Fr. Blackie the Superior—extraordinary impression made on Chris—evening talk. Dick snubs Chris, who talks about priesthood. Goes off next day to publisher's office where he works.

Chap. III. Talk with Dick, who describes Chris's life—his perseverance. Stirling comes to dine. He looks distressed, says nothing.

Chap. IV. I call upon Chris—see his rooms: piety, simplicity. Together we go to Oratory, meet Lady Brasted coming out. Chris's behaviour admirable. I am asked to go and see her.

Chap. V. I do, and hear she is a Catholic.

Chap. VI. Dick turns up three months later to tell me Chris has been accepted for seminary.

## PART II (Three Years Later)

Chap. I. I go down to Esher, having heard Chris's first Mass (served), and find him in heart of work: vivid; popular. Incident of snub. Chris's zeal for devotions. He has been there eight months. See Rector, hear of Lady Brasted's munificence.

Chap. II. Go down to Dick again after Christmas—go over to see Rolls, who asks affectionately after Chris; and is silent: asks about reaction; hears there is none, and looks graver still.

Chap. III. Am at a wedding; meet Lady Brasted there and hear about Chris—she is characteristic—reverent to his office, contemptuous of him.

Chap. IV. Then comes first bad news. Two months later—

(Chris a priest two years) Dick comes to my home, terrified, with letter from Chris. He goes down, and wires that he is reassured.

Chap. V. The smash. Chris bolts—refuses to see anyone—hides himself.

### PART III

#### Chap. I

[This was never continued. The next draft is headed "One in a Thousand" (erased), "The Conventionalists."]

Algy is never comfortable anywhere—at Eton he was not—at Cambridge he is not. He tries feebly for various things—gropes for reality—"disillusioned." Miss Maple is a "sham mystic" who "smells of fur and eau de Cologne." His "first violent shock" is a conversation between Lady Brasted and Mary Maple which he "overhears," and is furious. [In this version (which the actual book follows closely on the whole) Harold and Sybil are "both very serious on religion which is no part of them." It is a "nervous curate" who attends Theo's "solemn conventional death-bed." "Algy breaks out at death-bed against conventionality."]

"The story is told by me for the most part. My rôle is an interested observer. 'All things to all men.'"

Chap. IV. of the last part is to end with Mary Maple's hearing that Algy is accepted at Parkminster.

"Ends. Mary stood up suddenly from her corner. 'And I,' she cried, in a horrible voice, 'what are you going to do with me?'"

[The following plan of Monsignor Benson's original idea for *An Average Man*, taken from the end of an engagement-book, may be found interesting:]

An Average Man. A long book.

Idea of a man who fails to do either good or evil for *right* reasons, but who finally does a fine thing for insufficient conventional reasons.

(1) Falls in love with a girl (divorcée) above him in social scale . . . it is annulled by Rome . . . demands promises—will not give them—girl marries a blackguard.

(2) An S. J. extraordinary power—appeals to him intensely—does not respond.

Son of a doctor in a provincial town—sisters. . . .

These must be foreshadowed in his childhood: he must fail in small ways.

The final sacrifice for a religion he does not believe in any longer. . . .

He must be left to choir practices.

[The rest is written with a new pen, and perhaps at a different period.]

He joins the Territorials. He reads *The Nation*.

His mother is left considerable fortune, by an alienated aunt. They move to larger house—try to set up as country gentry. This comes just as he is under instruction. . . . Accordingly he breaks it off, with real pain, unable to rise to it. He had hoped to become a Franciscan too. Picture of perfect monastery.

Girl, too, throws him over as [this is erased]. He throws girl over, when he finds she is looked at askance by county people.

#### IV. See II., p. 122

LIST OF COURSES AND SERMONS PREACHED BY MGR. R. H. BENSON IN THE CARMELITE CHURCH, KENSINGTON, W. 1907-1914.

LENT, 1907. TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, *Place of the Will in Religion* (4.30 P.M.).

This course was his first appearance in a LONDON public church. He came up from Cambridge for it.

GOOD FRIDAY, 1907, 3 P.M. *Passion of Christ*.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL. High Mass at 11 A.M., July 16th, 1907. *Our Lady of Mount Carmel*.

SUNDAYS OF LENT, 1908. High Mass, 11. *Paradoxes of the Catholic Church*.

SUNDAY, September 6 (High Mass), 1908. *The Blessed Sacrament*. This was for the great Eucharistic Congress then at Westminster Cathedral.

SUNDAY, High Mass, 11, November 8, 1908. *Appeal for Nazareth House, Hammersmith*.

This appeal was a record as to results.

SUNDAYS of January, 1909. High Mass. *Five Needs of the Soul*.

Sunday Morning, High Mass, 31st January 1909. Added an

*appeal* to his sermon in aid of the Norman Potter institute for cripples.

Sunday mornings, High Mass, October, 1909. *Five Conditions of True Christianity.*

FEAST OF ST. THERESA, October 15th, 1909. High Mass. *On the Feast.*

Sunday morning, October 17th, 1909. Added appeal for our new foundation at Chesham, Bucks.

TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, 4.30 P.M., Lent 1910. *Mystical Life of Christ in His Church.*

GOOD FRIDAY, 3 P.M., 1910. *The Passion.*

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL, July 16th, 1910. *On the Feast.*

Sunday morning. FEAST OF ST. THERESA. October 15th, 1910. *On the Feast.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass, January, 1911. *The Friendship of Christ.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass. October, 1911. *Some Hard Sayings of Christ.*

October 15th, 1911. FEAST OF ST. THERESA. *On the Feast.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass, May, 1912. *Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life.*

December 8th, 1912. Appeal for Nazareth House.

Sunday mornings.<sup>1</sup> Advent, 1912. *Signs of the Coming of Christ.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass, May, 1913. *Some Questions and Answers in the Gospel.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass, November, 1913. *Some Modern Substitutes for Religion.*

Sunday mornings. High Mass, May, 1914. *Some Religious Difficulties.*

Novena in preparation for Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 7th to July 15th, 1914. *Titles of Our Lady.*

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL. High Mass, July 16th, 1914. *On the Feast.*

He was to have preached for the Triduum for the Tercentenary of the Beatification of St. Theresa on October 14, 1914, but was

<sup>1</sup> During this course he was terribly ill and suffering, and went after it into Miss Fullerton's home for the operation, giving no specific title to the course. But he introduced the Balkan war, &c. &c.

taken ill on his way to the station at Manchester on the Monday, and wrote to say he had been ordered to bed.

V. See II., p. 302

I print the following letter in connection with the chapter on Hugh Benson's attitude towards the occult. They supplement one another. Also I add the horoscope he caused to be made in 1911.

"It seems to me vitally important that you should give up automatic handwriting. It is true that the Church altogether forbids it; but even apart from that I should say exactly the same thing. It is not as though you had not now other connections with the supernatural. You have come again into touch with God, and know quite enough to keep in touch with Him. And the point you have emphasized—that of the evil smell—is quite enough to show the extreme danger you will be running if you have anything more to do with the practice. That is a well-known symptom of the overpowering presence of evil. I have come across it more than once. Secondly, I recommend you to show those papers to no one else—I will keep them until I hear from you—and to destroy them. The atonement is not required of you now that you have expressed yourself willing to make it. And instead I recommend you very strongly indeed to be absolutely simple and faithful to the Christian religion.

"The reason why I recommend this course of action is not that I believe your experiences to be merely subjective. On the contrary, I believe them to be objective, and that they are dangerous for that very reason. I have no doubt whatever that disembodied spirits have been dealing with you—and I have also no doubt at all that we are not intended by God to encourage those conscious dealings. I believe that you will be endangering more than you know if you continue. It cannot be *necessary* to continue these dealings, as the power of entering into them is confined to very few; and one knows by bitter experience the terrible injuries to mind and soul and body that sooner or later always seem to follow such a course of action. I do entreat you to draw a line across your life now, and to begin all over again, as our Lord tells us, like a little child. That is the glory of the Christian religion, that such a beginning again is possible. Please let me tell you again how deeply I sympathise with all that you have gone through and with the gallant atonement you have made. And I tell you

now with the utmost confidence that God does not ask more of you in this way, but simply that you begin again like a little child."

The horoscope he finally obtained in 1911 went as follows :

## SUMMARY

### INFLUENCE OF THE SUN

*(The influence of the sun is strongest from thirty-five years of age onwards)*

Those born with the sun in Scorpio should find success in some sphere of activity which demands the exercise of concentration and personal magnetism; or which is associated with the mastery of men or of natural forces; with work that is vitalising or regenerating or dominating in some way; in any case, with the use or misuse of power. . . .

### INFLUENCE OF THE MOON

*(The influence of the moon is strongest in childhood)*

The moon in Virgo gives practical and business-like methods of attacking work; habits of industry; irritability; and a critical rather than an appreciative turn of mind and style of expression.

### THE ASCENDANT

Leo as Ascendant suggests attainment through kingship or the responsibility for the welfare of others. This type of personality is usually very fond of children and very fatherly with them. Tremendously interested in awakening and guiding their minds: Jupiter rising would make it easy to come into touch with others and to make friends. Uranus also rising increases interest in character, and in occult study.

### THE ZENITH

Aries at the Zenith gives spiritual aspirations for complete manifestation, and practical ambitions to be always in the vanguard and to take part in pioneer work of some kind. The outlook is expectant and progressive, sometimes rather unsettled.

## THE DESCENDANT

Aquarius descending is associated with the type of mind that is absolutely open, unbiased, and free from prejudice, and which consequently often appears to be uncertain in its conclusions.

## THE NADIR

Libra at the Nadir suggests a scrupulous sense of honour and a love of balance or fair proportions, which involves an appreciation of beauty.

## ANALYSIS

ASCENDANT—Leo.

RULER—The Sun.

## DESCRIPTION

According to the position  
of signs.Modified by the position  
of planets.

Type	Regal	and	Commanding.
Watchwords	Faith	and	SERVICE.
Method	Deputing	and	Selective.
Style	Straightforward	—	Concise.
Intellect	Comprehensive	—	Logical.
Speech	Deliberate	—	Frank.
Manner	Stately, but by turns		Deferential and authoritative.
Bearing	Magnanimous	and	Adaptable.
Temperament	Energetic	—	Reserved.

ZENITH—Aries.

Functions	The Pioneer	and	The Governor.
Outlook	Expectant	—	Tolerant.
Nature	Impetuous	but	Thorough.
Affections	Impulsive	and	Overflowing.
Attitude	Courageous	—	Diplomatic.
Sex-attitude	Ardent	—	Protective.
Disposition	Generous	—	Trustful.

DESCENDANT—Aquarius

Mind	Open	—	Large.
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NADIR—Libra

Character	Honourable and ambitious.
Keynotes	Beauty and POWER.

Those who wish to hold that Monsignor Benson's characteristics were by 1911 sufficiently public to render the above diagnosis a simple matter without any astral assistance, will have little difficulty in defending their position. The document is quoted here as an illustration of what he liked and sought and kept, but as a proof of nothing whatsoever.

VI. See II., p. 134.

A  
CHRONICLE  
OF  
HARE STREET HOUSE  
NEAR  
BUNTINGFORD  
Written by ROBERT HUGH BENSON  
(who bought it in 1907 ; and began this Chronicle in 1914)  
AND CONTAINING  
AN EXACT ACCOUNT  
(so far as may be)  
OF THE  
CONDITION OF THE HOUSE  
when he bought it  
OF THE  
THINGS HE DID IN IT  
for its improvement  
AND THE  
MANNER OF THEIR DOING  
AND THE  
PERSONS  
who executed the same  
TOGETHER WITH  
AN ABUNDANCE OF INFORMATION  
AS TO THE  
GUESTS  
WHO CAME TO IT, AND AS TO  
NUMEROUS OTHER DETAILS  
BOTH INSTRUCTING AND DIVERTING



VII. See II., p 426

# MGR. BENSON'S PLAN FOR A NOVEL ON THE EUROPEAN WAR

- I. PRIEST COMING OUT OF MASS: POST OFFICE: SEES IT  
IS WAR
- II. BARRACKS: HE COMES OUT, IN UNIFORM: REMINIS-  
CENCES: MEETS A STUDENT: THEN A JESUIT PRIEST
- III. THE MARCH: SEES CHURCHES: KNOWS VERY LITTLE.  
SMOKE OF SHELLS: AEROPLANE
- IV. UNDER FIRE: HIS FAILURE WITH A DYING MAN:  
JESUIT DIES
- V. BELGIAN VILLAGE: HORRORS: PRIESTS SHOT
- VI. ENGLISH CHEER HIM UP: SEES THEM FIGHT
- VII. HIS WOUND AND CAPTURE: TELLS THEM HE IS A  
PRIEST: TRIAL: CONDEMNATION
- VIII. SIMPLY SENT OFF UNDER GUARD IN TRAIN: ESCAPES,  
HELP OF BAVARIANS
- IX. GETS BACK TO HIS REGIMENT: SENT TO A LINE OF  
COMMUNICATIONS: PEACE AND QUIET: HIS MOTHER'S  
HOUSE
- X. GARRISON: PIOUS COLONEL. HE SAYS MASS: AND IS  
SHOT: A PRIEST-SOLDIER HEARS HIS CONFESSION  
UHLANS' PATROL



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# INDEX

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